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OLD AVOIRDUPOIS.

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OLD AVOIRDUPOIS.

CHAPTER I.

OLD AVOIRDUPOIS AND CAPTAIN JIM.

DOWN by a Western stream, in a nook shielded on all sides by the surrounding woods, a camp-fire was burning. The man who built that fire understood his business, and knew that the savage enemy who make that country a place of danger would discern upon the horizon the faintest trace of smoke; the wood which was placed upon the fire was of the dryest description, burning with a clear flame, without sending up the least smoke. He had chosen a spot where a bluff rose between the fire and the river, so that any wandering savage passing up or down the stream would have found it extremely difficult to see it even though he might pass close at hand. There was a single figure at the fire, that of a tall, very stout man, of Falstaffian proportions, who was bending over the flame, cooking a juicy venison-steak, and watching it with the care of an epicure. The face of the man was broad and good-natured, and at the first glance it scarcely seemed possible that he could be a man fitted for the hazardous life he must lead, in such a country as this. Yet a second look at the determined gray eye and the firm lips, was enough to convince the close observer that he was a man of rare determination and courage.

His dress was a sort of hunting-shirt of dark-green cloth, belted at the waist, and sustaining a pair of heavy pistols of the most approved make, and a bowie-knife, the blade of which was nearly a foot long. His stout limbs were incased in the leatheren leggings usually worn upon the trail, but without the fringe with which the scouts sometimes ornamented them. His feet were covered by moccasins, and he wore a huge sombrero, looped up at one side by a buck-skin thong. Leaning against a tree close at hand was a heavy rifle, to-

ward which his hand extended itself at the faintest sound which came from the forest. This weapon was of extraordinary length, and had evidently seen much service, although the steel and brass upon its stock were polished carefully, and showed that the strange man had that instinctive tenderness for his favorite weapon which all good bordermen show.

Just behind him, picketed upon the soft grass which covered the little glade, was a powerful piebald horse, whose points would have excited the admiration of a horseman. His head was small, his neck short, the chest broad and limbs powerful, showing him possessed of the two essential qualities, speed and endurance.

"Quiet, will you, Rocket," whispered the man, as the horse raised his head and appeared to listen. "What do you hear, old boy?"

After a moment the animal dropped his head, and again began to crop the luxuriant vegetation, as if satisfied that it was a false alarm. His master finished the cooking of his venison, and laid it upon a clean piece of bark, while he took from a haversack at his side two or three cakes of corn-bread, which he laid beside the meat. Then he went to the riverside with a tin cup, dipped up some of the clear cold water, and sat down to his simple meal.

"Who would have thought, twelve years ago, that I, the pampered epicure and aristocrat, would enjoy such food as this?" he muttered. "Well, well, life is full of strange chances, and I never have been happier in my life than I am on these boundless plains, whither the one object of my life has drawn me."

He said no more, but applied himself to the food before him, eating with an appetite which only labor can impart. When he had finished, he washed it down by a deep draught from the cup, and threw away the bark which had served him for a plate.

He was not an old man—perhaps was forty years of age, though his dark locks were sprinkled with gray. In spite of his obesity he was a handsome person, and one who would have inspired confidence at the first glance.

"The grass for my bed, and a star-clouded canopy above

me," he said, as he finished the cup. "Now I'll see to Rocket, and then for a good night's rest."

He rose and pulled up the picket-pin which was driven into the earth, let out a little more of the lariat, and removed the pin to a new spot, driving it firmly into the earth with his heel. This done, he moved back to the shelter of a tree, wrapped a blanket about him and lay down as tranquilly as you and I commit ourselves to our beds at home. Yet he knew that all about him were the bands of the wild Comanche and Apache, and white men, outlawed for their crimes, more savage than they.

The darkness grew deeper; the night was passing; star after star came out in the blue sky and he slept peacefully, while the horse cropped the fresh green grass upon which he trod. Strange sounds were heard about him; creeping things passed by, the night-birds flitted through the branches with their peculiar cries, but these were not the sights and sounds to arouse a keen old frontiersman, such as the one beneath the tree, and he slept on unconscious of passing events.

It might have been three o'clock in the morning when the horse suddenly erected his ears again, and reaching forward touched his master with his muzzle. As he did not awake at once, the acute creature caught the blanket in his teeth and gave it a shake. The sleeper was instantly upon his feet, with his rifle in his hand. Yet he saw nothing, heard nothing unusual.

"This makes twice to-night you have fooled me, Rocket," he said, shaking his finger in a threatening manner at the horse. "Take care that you don't do it again."

Rocket was dragging hard at his picket-pin, and after a struggle succeeded in pulling it from the earth in which it was imbedded and springing at a small tree close at hand struck it with his feet, caught hold of the bark with his teeth, and in other ways endeavored to show his master that some object of hatred was concealed there. The moon was shining brightly, and, stepping under the tree, the man looked up and caught sight of a dark figure hugging the trunk, motionless as death.

"Who is there?" said the man, in a low, but distinct voice. "Come down out of that."

No reply was made, and the wanderer cocked his rifle and pointed it deliberately into the tree. "I never threaten except I mean to perform ; come down," he said.

The creature, human or otherwise, moved a little, and seemed inclined to go higher amid the foliage, but upon second thoughts, changed its purpose, and spake :

"Drive the horse back, will you?"

"Will you come down?"

"Of course I'll come down. Any one would under the delicate persuasion of a leveled rifle," replied the person in the tree. "It's Hobson's choice with me, I guess."

The horse, at a word from his master, retreated a few paces ; then a small, lithe figure dropped from the tree and stood upon the sward beneath.

"Why, it's a boy!" cried the owner of the horse. "What are you doing here alone?"

"As far as that goes, what are *you* doing here alone?" replied the boy, for he was nothing else, and small for his age at that. He might have been seventeen years of age, but there was a reckless hardihood and daring in his looks which quite startled the man. This lad, rigged out as a miniature scout, with rifle, pistols and knife, did not seem to be in the least frightened. His face was small, keen and intelligent, and the man saw that he had no common person to deal with.

"You are old *pie*, ain't you, mister?" the youth said, laughing. "My! You couldn't walk on the water, could you?"

"See here, young man," said the stranger, catching him by the shoulder, "don't begin any impudence with me, because I am hardly the man to bear it."

"I know that, Old Avoirdupois," replied the boy, pertly.

"You have my prairie *sobriquet* rather pat for a youth I have never seen. Now then, who are you?" demanded the stranger.

"Pshaw ! don't you know *me*? I seen *you* at Fort Kearney in the year fifty-two. You was up there with Big Sam and Harry Harry, and had just come in from the plains."

"And where were you?"

"Lord love you, how inquisitive a man can be when he

gives his mind to it! I was driving a wagon in Burt Pickney's train."

"They called you Captain Jim, I think?" said Old Avoirdupois, inquiringly.

"That's my name," replied the boy, promptly. "Now don't be afraid of me, Avoirdupois; I won't hurt you."

"You impudent young scoundrel! I believe I should do you a service if I gave you a hiding."

"Don't do that, mister," said the boy, with a strange flash of his eyes. "You might be sorry for it, some time, if you laid a hand upon me. I can't help my tongue being a little sharp now and then, but I mean no harm."

"It is ridiculous in me to threaten a boy," said Old Avoirdupois, after a moment's pause. "I never heard any harm of you, but, on the contrary, have heard many speak of you as a brave little fellow. Let us be friends, my boy, for whites should stick together in this wild country."

"So they should—so they should," replied the boy. "Now that you talk like a Christian, I'll tell you about it. I was out with a small hunting-party on the route, and yesterday we got separated because I *would* chase a buffalo. I can't stand the sight of the hairy, lumbering creatures without wanting to give them a pill. I calculated to get up with them to-day, but I found a party of Apaches between me and the camp, and couldn't do it. The boys have got on an island up here, in the river, about five miles, and the Indians are trying to get them out. I saw your fire as I came up just now—I was trying to get back to the boys, you know—and so I came in and took tree until I could find out who you was, but the horse smelled me out. He's a beauty, that beast is."

"He has been my constant companion for many years," replied Old Avoirdupois. "Your explanation satisfies me, and we will keep together until you can rejoin your friends, if you like."

"Two are better than one when the Apaches are on the trail," replied the lad. "I guess we'd better get across the run, for they are all on this side. Hush!"

He lifted his hand as a signal of caution, and listened. They heard a muffled sound, as of hoofs upon the turf. The

boy caught up his rifle, and signing to Old Avoirdupois to stand still, glided away in the darkness, and the thick foliage hid him from view.

The lad was not gone three minutes when he came gliding back like a shadow, and whispered in the ear of the other.

"Won't your horse neigh? Other horses are coming, and he might betray us."

"Don't be afraid of Rocket, for he knows as much as a man about these things. Where is your horse?"

"In the bushes. I've muffled his nose in a blanket and he can't raise a row. Do you want to see who they are?"

"Certainly," replied Old Avoirdupois. "Let me lead the way, for where I can get through I think *you* can follow."

The boy chuckled aloud, and followed the huge form of Avoirdupois through the bushes, admiring the lightness of his tread, and the skill with which he parted the bushes before him. They reached the edge of the timber and both kneeled so that they could peer through the green screen without being seen, and waited. The sound of advancing hoofs grew louder, and soon a band of Apaches rounded the point of the woods and rode by at a good pace. They were all strong and well-armed warriors, their gay blankets, feathers and trappings showing plainly in the clear moonlight, while their spears and axes glittered like stars in the night. The two watchers held their breath, as they saw at the head, the chief most dreaded along the border, clothed in a panoply of steel like a knight of the old days. It was the pride of the Apache, the Terror of the Plains—"Steel-Coat; the Apache."

As they gazed, the horse of Captain Jim, which had in some way freed himself from the blanket, gave utterance to a loud neigh.

"Back!" whispered Old Avoirdupois. "Back or we are lost."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ISLAND.

ON an island in the river, five miles from the place in which Old Avoirdupois and Captain Jim were hiding from the Apaches, a strong party of whites were holding at bay three times their number of Indians. On the bank of the river lay two dismantled wagons, just as they had been forced to abandon them, and the earth was strewn with blankets, lariats and the like, which they had been obliged to leave behind. Twice that night had the Indians essayed to reach the island and as often had they been forced back by the steady fire of the prairie-men.

"Boys," said a stalwart Kentuckian, known as "Big Sam" along the border, "this yer is somethin' like work, but I'm jubous we ain't see'd the end of it yet. Them cussid reds ar' waitin' fur some one, and like ez not they'll git more men and come on us like a flood, blast 'em."

"I see a red scoundrel," cried one of the men. "Take that, to spoil your loping."

The rifle cracked and a half-naked Apache, who was stealing from one cover to another to get a better shot at the whites, dropped in his tracks, pierced through the heart by the well-aimed shot.

"Wiped out," said Big Sam, quietly. "Shoot close, boys; every red you rub out now is one less to meet when we buckle to in airnest. Keep 'em off till sun-up and then we don't keer for 'em."

"Unless Steel-Coat should happen along. He's the boy that can make the reds fight by daylight," said one of the men.

"I hope 'tain't Steel-Coat's band," replied Big Sam, "and yit they are Apash, an' nothin' else. Ef it sh'u'd be, an' they ar' waitin' fur him, thar's some trouble ahead. I wonder what's come to the little capt'in, the cantankerous little cuss; I warned him not to go a-chasin buffler."

"I guess they can not catch Jim easily," said the man who had shot the Indian, and who had deliberately reloaded his weapon after the discharge and was engaged in driving home the ball. "The boy is pretty keen."

"I know he ar', Duke," replied Big Sam, "but that boy hez got a warm place in my heart and I'd hate to hear that he's cum to harm. I larn't the little 'un how to shoot, an' he's a good scholard, too. Blame the luck! That Injin will hev it, Duke; I kain't help it."

Even as he spoke the rifle came rapidly to his shoulder and a savage who had showed himself for a moment dropped in his tracks, dead before he struck the ground. His fall was hailed by vengeful yells from his companions, and a rush was actually made into the water, which was met by the most determined resistance upon the part of the bordermen. Three or four Indians dropped into the water and were borne away by the stream, and the rest retreated to the cover of the bushes which fringed the bank, while the whites again gathered in the midst of the cover, as coolly as if nothing had happened.

"They'll git tired of that kind of fun," said Big Sam. "I know they will. Hark; some one is blazin' away down-stream."

The crack of rifles could be heard and lights began to gleam along the bank, near the spot where Old Avoirdupois had made his camp.

"Some one is having it hot and hot down thar," repeated Big Sam in an uneasy tone. "I wonder who they ar'?"

"Let's look to our own bacon fust," replied one of the men. "We ain't safe ourselves."

"Don't be selfish, Tom Binks," said Big Sam. "It's a ridiculous failing in a prahary man, and I don't like it. Them ar' feller-critters down thar ur' chased by rascally 'Paches, and I'd hate orfully to have them git any advantage over white men."

"Do you suppose it is Captain Jim they are after?" asked Duke Darrall.

"Don't talk that way, Duke," replied Big Sam. "You rile up my feelin's bad when you do it. Jim is a good boy."

"He's a spiteful little cuss," growled Tom Binks, in a sulky tone.

"Wha-a-a-t! Say it again, and by the big broken pitcher I'll mash you on the nose. Don't speak ag'in' the boy when he's away and kain't help hisself."

"You always take up for the boy," was the sulky reply. "But, see here, Big Sam; I'm a rooster—I am. I'm a crowin' rooster from the big Red, and I don't 'low no man, big or little, old or young, to crow over me. Hyar's the great unmixed," roared the man. "Hyar's the warrior-bird of the North, the unlicked fowl that crows and crows and crows! Cock a doodle-doo!"

The man struck a ridiculous posture, flapped his long arms and indulged in a long, loud and melodious imitation of the fowl he claimed to represent. Such a challenge as that, in such a party could have only one result, for these men, who were just now resting from a battle with the savage foe seemed each and all ready and eager to take up the gauntlet thrown down by Crowing Tom, who had dropped his rifle and was prancing about on the green turf of the island, challenging all to the fray. He was a long-limbed, wiry, muscular fellow, with a settled look of discontent about his dark brows, and a vicious light in his twinkling gray eyes.

"Hold on," cried Big Sam, thrusting the men right and left. "Do I lead this yer party, or don't I? Ef I do, what the devil do *you* mean by starting a fight now, Tom Binks?"

"I'm the crowing rooster of the North," screamed Tom, at the top of his voice. "The lightning-winged bird of the boundless West; the fighting phenomenon of the prahary trail! Who is fur a little scrimmage with the unlicked bird?"

"You'll lose that title in about two minnits and a half," cried Sam, beginning to lose patience. "And you'll be the wust-licked bird in this yer section. Don't be a fool, Tom; I'll fight you when we've settled with the 'Paches."

"I *can't wait*," was the shrill reply. "I'm mortifying fur a scrimmage. I'm eager fur a fray, and I *must* have it."

"Where would you be ef Big Sam hits you, Tom?" said Duke Darrall. "Don't be foolish."

By way of reply Tom Binks made an insulting motion in front of Big Sam, who rewarded it by a blow which knocked

him clean off his feet. He was up in a moment, and sprung at the big guide like a wild-cat, with a snarl of hate and rage. Again that strong hand shot out from the shoulder, and Tom Binks rolled upon the earth; but, as he rose, he held in his hand a pistol which he leveled at the breast of Big Sam. Duke Darrall made a sudden leap and kicked the weapon from his hand, sending it spinning twenty feet into the air, and one of the men knocked him down. Before he could rise, a cord was upon his arms, and he was in the center of a group of excited men, swearing, pushing and threatening him.

By prairie-law, the man who had provoked a fight and then took up deadly weapons, was regarded with horror and detestation by the rest, and it depended upon the temper of the men, and their regard for the man assailed, whether the transgressor escaped with his life. Big Sam, strong as he was, found it impossible to break into the group of excited men, who were hauling the wretch up and down, while some were crying out for a lariat, that they might hang him on the nearest tree.

"No, no, boys," cried Big Sam; "don't hang the fool; he ain't wuth it."

"You keep back, Sam Sully," cried Duke, hissing the words through his set teeth. "Let the boys alone."

"It's murder," cried Tom Binks. "Let up, boys, let up. I was only fooling when I pulled iron on him. I didn't mean to use the barker. Let a fellow go."

"Hang him," cried a hoarse voice. "String him up."

A lariat was procured, and a noose quickly and deftly formed in one end, which was slipped over the neck of the struggling man. One of the rangers ran up a tree with the quickness of a cat, passed an end of the lariat over a strong limb and threw it down to his waiting comrades below, who seized it with shouts of delight, and dragged away on it until they had drawn it so taut as to have complete control of the prisoner.

"Don't, boys—don't!" moaned the unhappy man. "I didn't mean to do it. Let me go, and I'll never pick another fight."

"I think not," replied Duke Darrall, contemptuously. "Where is your crowing now, you half-and-half? If you

know any prayers, I don't know any better time to say them than the present."

"Don't let them hang me, Sam," screamed the now thoroughly-frightened wretch. "Stand by me; you used to stand by a man."

There was a strong recommendation of the character of Big Sam conveyed in this appeal to one whose life he would have taken in a moment of passion, and Big Sam tried to get into the circle, but was forced back by the men. While they struggled with him, and the body of Tom Binks was already rising into the air, Sam broke into their midst, and at a single stroke, cut the rope, letting the nearly insensible body of Binks drop to the earth.

"Look thar!" he cried, "we ar' wasting time, for Steel-Coat has come."

They looked out and saw by the light of the fires, the warrior who had led the band past the camp of Old Avoirdupois riding up to the river, scanning the island as he came. They knew him well, and determined to abandon the island at once.

There was no time to lose, for the time in the morning had arrived when Indians generally make their attacks. It is a mistake to suppose that Indians, at least in the present day, delight to make their attacks by night. It is just at early morning, just as the light begins to appear, or at the approach of night, when the assailed party are off their guard.

"What shall we do with Tim Binks, Sam?" said Duke, as the half-strangled man rose to his elbow and gazed wildly about him.

"Let him go, the poor mean-sperrited cuss," said Sam. "He ain't wuth powder. Just take the rope off his arms and let him go where he likes, but he kain't stay with us."

They mounted and pushed their horses into the stream, the water gradually deepening as they proceeded, until it rose above the saddle-girths, and leading his horse a little up the water-course the foremost rider pushed off into the deeper part, holding up his rifle and ammunition so as to be out of the way of the water. It was a dangerous thing to attempt, but they reached the shore in safety and hastily collected upon the bank. By the loss of Tom Binks their party was now reduced to ten, but they were all men of the plains who

had little fear of danger. The object of their mission had been defeated by the capture of the wagons and the destruction of the goods they contained, and being no longer hampered by these wagons they had only their own safety to look to and were reckless of consequences.

"I hate awfully to run," said Sam, as they paused upon the bank, "but it's got to be did. What's that?"

They heard a voice upon the island calling out to some one on the shore, and the hands of the men dropped upon their weapons as they recognized the voice as that of Tom Binks, and knew that he was shouting to the Indians.

"I'd cut his throat if we had him now," cried Duke Darrall. "Listen to that."

A voice answered Tom Binks from the opposite bank, *in English*, demanding to know what he wanted.

"Come on, come on!" shouted Tom. "They've run, and yer won't catch them unless you hurry."

"I've a mind to go back," hissed Big Sam, "but I'm jubious we couldn't git thar in time. Forward; down the river, boys."

As they rode away the confusion became greater upon the opposite shore, and they could hear the Indians crossing in great numbers, guided by the shouts of the traitorous Binks, who took this measure to save his own life. They rode rapidly, and as they proceeded, the morning began to break, and just as the morning beams began to streak the distant horizon they reached a point opposite the place where we left Old Avoirdupois and his young friend. There was a thick wood upon this side as well as the other, and as they rode through it, a figure suddenly started up in the path, and laid its hand upon Big Sam's bridle. Without waiting to see who it was, the guide grasped a hatchet, but dropped it with a laugh as he saw the face of Old Avoirdupois.

"Ha, old true blue," cried the guide. "You thar, eh! Oh, hullo; ain't this bully? you little cuss, I never was so glad to see any one in all my life."

The last words were addressed to Captain Jim, who had just appeared from the bushes.

"I'm all right, Sam," replied the boy. "I wouldn't have been if I had been alone. This man helped me through the

river when the cussed reds chased us. Heard them firing, did ye?"

"Yes, Jim. Whar did you spring from, Avoirdupois?" said Duke Darrall. "I'm glad to see you."

"I have been looking for you, and accidentally lighted upon this boy. How did you get off the island?"

"We hain't got time to talk now. Git your hosses and come along," said Sam.

They mounted and rode away together, and all were surprised at the lightness and grace with which Old Avoirdupois swung himself into the saddle, except the two who knew him well. Some of the younger members of the party were inclined to joke a little at the obesity of their new comrade; but were sternly stopped by Big Sam.

"Wait till you know a man afore you make fools of yourselves, boys. You think me a tough customer, but you'd find a harder one in Avoirdupois, I judge. Ha! look thar. By the livin' hokies, them Injins hev got a white pris'ner. Arter them, bullies; go it."

Just in front a party of Indians, of perhaps twice their number, were advancing at a trot, while in their midst a slight girlish figure was seen, who appeared to be closely watched by the Indians. At the first shout of the guides, the Indians halted, and shaking their lances, advanced boldly to the attack, a proceeding wholly unlooked for by the whites, who had expected them to give way at once before their charge. Indeed, it is only among the most warlike of the tribes that any are found hardy enough to meet the assault of a force of whites of any thing like their numbers. It was a gallant sight as they came on, their plumes dancing in the breeze, and their lance-points glittering brightly under the rays of the rising sun. As they advanced, the girl whom they had taken for a prisoner was seen to draw out of the line, and gallop away at full speed across the plain, accompanied by two strong warriors, who seemed to serve as her body-guard.

"There she goes," cried Big Sam. "Now give these chaps living blazes."

As they came in short pistol-range, the rifles cracked, and many a saddle was emptied, while riderless steeds fled by with dangling rein. The next moment the whites, armed with

knife and hatchet, broke through the ranks of the enemy, beating down their lance-points, and striking them, man after man, upon the sod. They fought desperately, but their strength was of slight avail against the tempered and tried weapons of their foes. Old Avoirdupois was a host in himself. Instead of being unwieldy, or fighting slowly, he was one of the first who broke through the line, and his hand struck down the leader of the war-party. As he fell, an Indian lifted a long lance, and would have driven it through the body of Old Avoirdupois, but, at that moment, the red-skin fell, shot through the heart by Captain Jim.

"Hooray!" screamed the lad. "Down with the thieves."

The Apaches were scattered, and perhaps half of them were careering over the plain, urging their horses for life or death. Eight or ten lay dead upon the grass, but of those who escaped, many had received ghastly wounds. Several of the whites had been hurt, but none of them so badly but their simple remedies would set all right.

"That's a good job," cried Big Sam. "Let the reds go back to that roarin' thief, Steel-Coat, and tell him how they like old Kentuck. You ain't hurt, old man?"

"Not a scratch," replied Old Avoirdupois, whose face was hardly flushed by his exertions. "But if you want to catch that girl, you had better ride hard, or they will get to the ford."

"She ain't a pris'ner, at all," said Sam. "When I came to see her close, I knew that she was Steel-Coat's daughter, the pootiest gal, ef she *is* an Injin, in all the plains. Why, she's nigh about as white as you are."

"How comes that?"

"They do say that her mother was a white woman, and that Steel-Coat himself is not of pure Injin blood. Don't waste time hyar, fur the reds will be crazy when they git this news. Don't wait fur the ha'r, boys; we ain't got time."

But, all except Duke Darrall were already out of the saddle, and engaged in taking the trophies of their victory. The young man was standing in a meditative attitude, looking after the flying form of the Indian girl.

"Pshaw! what am I thinking of?" he muttered. "It can't be; I never could be in love with an Indian girl. Look

out, boys ; boot and saddle, for there comes Steel-Coat, with his whole band at his heels."

They looked back, and saw the same band which had pressed them on the island in hot pursuit. The rangers ran to their horses, and setting in their spurs, rode away to the north.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL FLAG-BEARER.

THEY rode hard, but close behind them came the Apache band, their cries making the prairie echo. Among them, unwatched, and seemingly regarded as a friend, rode Crowing Tom, who was as eager as any of the others to overtake his old comrades.

" You see," whispered Duke Darrall, in Sam's ear, " your mercy was misplaced, for that dastardly wretch is unworthy to be saved. It would have been better for you, better for us all, if the vultures had the picking of his bones."

" I didn't think he'd 'a' done it," replied Sam. " I'll take a shot at him, and it's ten to one he goes down."

He loosened the rifle from his saddle, as he spoke, and wheeling, even while his horse was in rapid motion, aimed full at the heart of Tom, the traitor. But the scoundrel saw his danger, and slunk back among his new associates ; and Sam, seeing the hopelessness of getting a shot at him, turned the muzzle upon Steel-Coat, who rode just in front of the rest. The rifle was discharged, and they saw the chief reel slightly in the saddle and put his hand to his breast ; but the next moment he uttered a defiant shout, and sprung on with renewed vigor. Big Sam turned pale, and the rifle shook in his strong hand.

" I'll swear I hit him full in the breast," he said. " That red has a charmed life."

The party was headed toward a ridge which towered aloft some three miles away. Could they reach it, the Kentuckian knew a place where they could safely hide, and in which they

could defy a tribe of savages. It was a race for life, and the Indians crawled up inch by inch upon them ; but the prairie-men won the race, and disappeared in a dark ravine, which penetrated the ridge in the south-eastern face.

The moment the rocks concealed them from view, they bounded out of the saddle, and picketing their horses upon the soft earth which formed the base of the ravine, they seized their weapons and ran out to give the savages a warm reception. The place was eminently calculated for defense, as the ridge stretched away on either side for miles, and there was not a gap through which horsemen might pass in any direction, which would enable the Apaches to turn the position. Just in front of the pass, many rocky bowlders lay scattered about, furnishing a secure retreat, from which they could pick off the savages without danger to themselves.

Captain Jim, always eager for a fray, was the first one to fire. He ran out as far as the bowlders extended, and, half sheltered by a huge rock, leveled at a tall savage who took the advance, riding a little in front even of Steel-Coat. The little rifle cracked, and the savage threw up his arms, dropped his lance, and clutched frantically at the flowing mane for support. But, a moment later, he dropped heavily to the earth, and his horse careered riderless across the plain.

"First up, best dressed !" cried Captain Jim. " Give them tar, lads !"

The rifles of the rangers began to speak, and told fearfully upon the Indians, for these were men who literally lived by the rifle, and did not know what it was to miss their aim at three hundred yards with so large an object to aim at as the body of a man. At a signal from Steel-Coat, the Apaches galloped out of range and collected together to hold a consultation.

"Those fellows think they are out of range," said Old Avordupois, who stood leaning on his rifle. "It is a long shot, but I think I can empty one more saddle."

As he spoke, the heavy rifle came slowly to his shoulder, the muzzle gradually rising to a level with the group upon the prairie. The moment the clouded steel became motionless the hammer fell, and a cloud of smoke rose slowly upward, and, to their delight, they saw Crowing Tom spring up

in his saddle, and fall into the arms of the savages about him, who at once rode a hundred yards further away.

"I don't think I killed him," said Avoirdupois, "but, I've marked the scoundrel so that he will respect a good rifle to the day of his death. Fifty yards nearer, and he would turn traitor no more. Ha! there is the girl!"

As he spoke, they saw the daughter of Steel-Coat coming up rapidly, still accompanied by the two men who acted as a body-guard. She at once entered into the conference, as if she had a right. Ten minutes passed, and they saw her advancing toward the pass, carrying a piece of white cloth fluttering upon a lance.

"Steel-Coat knows what a flag is, and who to send with it," said Big Sam. "Now, boys, be keerful; don't say any thing you would not like your mother or sister to hear."

"They had better not," said Duke Darrall, with a dark look at the men, "unless they want to fight with me, and I rather think none of them are anxious for that."

"Don't talk that way, Duke, or you'll rile up bad blood. The boys know me, an' they know I don't stand no nonsense. Hush; here she comes."

All the men held their breath, for never had they seen such a vision of beauty as that which now met their gaze. A young girl, not yet twenty, who sat her horse with ease and grace, and in whose dark cheek the flush of youth and life mantled richly. Her skin was about as dark as that of a Creole, and her eyes were full of the fathomless light seen in that wonderful people. She was about the medium height in woman, with an erect, supple figure framed in the most beautiful proportions. Her hair, unconfined save by a golden band, floated to the saddle in luxuriant waves; it was blue-black in color, with a gloss and luster seldom seen in hair of that tint.

Her dress was richer and in better taste than usual with Indian women, and was like that worn by the women of Mexico. A blue kirtle, with another of scarlet beneath, buck-skin leggins, and shapely moccasins were part of her attire. Over this was thrown a scarlet rebosa, which contrasted well with her dark complexion. On her head she wore a sort of skull-cap, with a single eagle feather fixed in the

side. Altogether she was the most enchanting figure which these rude hunters had ever seen. It is natural with these men to love something wild and free, and her character suited them exactly. Duke Darrall was a handsome fellow, a prairie Apollo, and the blood mounted into his dark cheek as he saw her near at hand.

"Let me go with you while you talk to her, Sam. Come; give me a chance," he whispered, eagerly.

"Come along, then," said Sam. "You come too, Avoirdupois."

The three men stepped out of the cover, and advanced toward the Indian girl, when her clear sweet voice called them to a halt, and to their surprise she spoke English easily and fluently.

"Stop where you are, men," she said. "Am I free to come, and go when I have given the message for which I am sent?"

"You have the word of a man who don't allow himself to lie," replied Big Sam, "that not a finger shall be lifted to stop you when you want to go."

"I thank you," said the girl, pressing her horse boldly to the side of the guide, and letting her eyes dwell for a moment upon the eager face of Duke Darrall, doing his business for life. "I am Wina, the daughter of Steel-Coat, the great chief of the Apache."

"I know'd that afore, but this yer gets me, *this* does. I never see an Injin gal that looked like you in all my born days," responded Sam.

"That is not my business here, white men," she replied coldly. "Steel-Coat the chief has sent me to ask, why you seek the hunting-grounds which are his people's, and kill those to whom the land belongs."

"As to them to whom the land belongs," replied Big Sam, "that ar' a matter in dispute. We claim that we've got ez much right to ride the prary as any Injin that ever straddled a hoss. And ez to killing Injins we never fire at an Injin unless he comes loping round to take our ha'r."

"The Indians defend what is their own," replied the girl, angrily. "But, my father is a great chief. The big white man and his followers have killed some of the bravest Apache

warriors. When the snows come down, many children will cry for food because the bones of the hunter who should give it them are whitening on the prairie. But, Steel-Coat is a just man and he knows that some of his young warriors have been to blame, and he is willing to be a friend to the big white man."

"That is hearty in him," said Big Sam. "Now, tell us what he wants to be a friend to us for?"

"There is one among you who is an enemy of the Apache, and who never spares them when he finds them on the plains. He is a bad man, and the Apache would take the enemy out of their path."

"Where is the man?" asked Sam.

Wina raised her hand and pointed at the immovable face of Old Avoirdupois, who looked at her with stony composure.

"The deuce!" cried Sam, "I know that Old Avoirdupois haz put down some Apache in his day, but he's got a good reason fur it. The Apache made him a wanderer, broke up his family, murdered his wife and children, and he kills 'em on sight and so would I."

"Listen," said Wina, laying her finger upon the shoulder of Old Avoirdupois. "Let the white man speak, and say that the words of the big hunter are true."

"It is true, my good girl," replied Old Avoirdupois. "The Apaches attacked my camp while crossing to Santa Fe, years ago, murdered all my family, and left me for dead. I have never forgotten or forgiven that crime, and, so help me God, I never will until my revenge is complete!"

"Wina has been deceived," said the girl, casting an angry look toward the plain where the Apache were assembled. "She was told that the white man killed for the love of blood, innocent men who crossed his path, without cause or reason. If Wina had known this she would not have come."

"Give your message," said Big Sam. "Let's hear it, anyhow."

"My father, the chief, would have you give up this white man to the Apache. When you have done that, he will ride away and leave you to go in peace. But if this warrior has a right to hate the Apache, if you are warriors, keep him and

fight for him until you die, for it is not just that men should turn against their friends, like the white traitor who is with us."

"Glorious girl!" cried Duke Darrall, aloud. "She an Indian? I won't believe it!"

The girl looked up at him quickly, and her dark eyes instantly dropped before his ardent gaze, and the rich color rose into her cheek. And in good truth, Duke Darrall was a man well calculated to win a woman's heart, especially one who had been trained in the wild life of the plains. Six feet high in his moccasins, with a form as straight as a cedar and a clear though dark complexion, his curling hair neatly arranged beneath his hunting-cap and his buck-skin suit fitting his form to perfection, he was the *beau ideal* of the hunter and scout. Duke was not well known upon the prairie, having been there but two years, and had fallen in with Big Sam and been his companion ever since. It was known that he did not trap much, and yet he seemed to have more money than the most industrious of his companions, but he was not miserly and spent his money freely. Such a man, frank, bold and true, was apt to win friends and be a favorite among the border beauties, but Duke Darrall had never met his fate until now.

"Then you think we didn't orter give up Old Avoirdupois to your father, gal?" asked Big Sam.

"No!" replied the girl.

"Then take that fur the answer. If Steel-Coat wants Old Avoirdupois let him come and take him, but there'll be wigs on the grass before he have done it."

"Look," said the girl, extending her hand frankly to Old Avoirdupois. "I came in anger because I believed that the truth had been spoken, and that the white man shed blood in sport. Now I know that I was wrong and that my father was wrong in seeking your blood, and so I will tell him."

"You are a noble young girl," said Old Avoirdupois, "and whatever happens to me, remember that James Seaton is your friend; and if at any time I can aid you, it is only necessary to call upon me, and if I live and am at liberty, you shall have help."

"I'd like to ask you a question," said Duke, in a quick, hurried way, as if more for the pleasure of speaking to her, than

for information. "You spoke of the traitor who left us; is he dead?"

"No; the bullet of the white man passed through his shoulder, but he will not die."

"He is too mean to die easy," replied the young man sharply. "Tell him that Duke Darrall is his enemy and will follow him to the death."

"Let the young white man speak his name again," said the girl, demurely.

"Duke Darrall; be sure to remember the name."

"I will remember; Duke Darrall—is that right?"

"That will do," replied Duke, with a sly smile. He had accomplished his purpose in giving the beautiful girl his name, and Seaton smiled at the ruse.

"I must go," said Wina, in a mournful tone. "Let me ask one thing of you brave white men. In the battle which is to come, spare my father, if you can."

"He shall not fall by my hand except to save my own life," said Darrall.

"My friends wait for me," said the beautiful girl. "I must say good-by, but Wina is no longer your enemy."

"Keep out of the way of the bullets, my sweet girl," said James Seaton: "go, and may the God above be with you and bless you, for you have a noble heart."

She waved them a silent farewell, and turned her horse's head toward the Apaches. For a moment it seemed as if Duke would attempt to detain her, and then he turned away with a sigh.

"She's the Queen of the prary and the flower of the tribe," said Big Sam. "Sufferin' Moses, what eyes she has! Git yer ammunition and make ready fur the cussidest b'ar-fight you ever hern tell of, fur Steel-Coat hez got fire in his eyes. What's the matter with you, Duke? I'll be doggoned ef I don't think you ar' in love with that little Injun."

"What's that to you?" replied Duke, sulkily. "I won't be bothered just now, for I don't feel in the mood."

Big Sam laughed lightly, but kept his eyes upon the movements of Wina. He saw her gain the camp and speak a few words with her father, and then a cry went up from the wild band.

"It was a declaration of war, and war to the knife.

"Kiver, boys, an' shoot close," cried Big Sam, "or you'll never see the Massasip ag'in. Now fur it."

CHAPTER IV.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

HE had scarcely spoken when the savage foe began to gallop in a circle about the plain, shaking their lances in the air, and uttering fierce shouts, those who were furnished with firearms discharging them as they passed the opening of the ravine in circling about the plain; but, sheltered as were the white men by the scattered bowlders, they remained in perfect safety, well knowing that this was only the prelude to the real attack, and reserving their fire, not caring to waste their ammunition at that distance, with nothing larger to aim at than the hand or foot of an Indian.

At a word from the chief, they separated into three detachments, one going to the right and one to the left, leaving only about twenty of their number dashing about the plain, making the most hideous outcries to call the attention of the whites from the movements of their friends on each side. But Big Sam was too old a bird to be caught in that way, and it was not long before he became cognizant of the fact that the two bands had dismounted, and were creeping up among the bowlders, their weapons ready for a fray.

"That's jest like that cussed Steel-Coat," roared Big Sam. "Fall back, boys, or the rascals will get round us."

The men obeyed the order, and without firing a shot, fell back some distance, leading their horses, until they reached a place where the cañon narrowed so that no more than three could pass abreast. In this opening they set to work piling up the thickly-scattered bowlders until they stood breast high, and behind this they ranged themselves, waiting for the rush of the enemy.

The white men knew that this particular band was composed

of trained fighting-men, skilled in the use of the weapons which they used in making an attack on foot, the knife and hatchet, and that it would be a hard struggle to beat them off, but they are eager for the fray and confident of their ability, with the advantage of position to do the work

They were not long left in doubt, for with a yell which resounded through the mountains, the Apaches charged into the pass. As the head of the party appeared, the rifles of the whites began to speak, and the terrible fray commenced. Foremost among the Indians, brandishing aloft a heavy ax, strode a stalwart figure, clad in a garment which resembled a coat of mail that glittered in the sun as he advanced. His face was covered by a sort of visor of the same material, which only left openings to admit of breathing freely, and to enable him to see. He was unscathed by the terrible fire, although several of his men were rolling in the dust, and before the hunters could load again, he was upon them, backed by thirty determined men, eager for blood. On his right and left stood two fierce-looking Indians armed with knife and ax, and these began to force their way over the obstruction in front. They were met by men as determined as they, for Big Sam, Old Avoirdupois, and Duke Darrall blocked the way, and the savages on the right and left of Steel-Coat, went down before the pistols in the hand of Big Sam and Darrall, while at the same time the steel-clad leader aimed a blow at the head of Old Avoirdupois. He avoided it and lunged out with his bowie, but the blade was shivered in his grasp, leaving his opponent uninjured.

The chief uttered a deep, guttural exclamation of joy, and again raised the ax, but before he could strike, a burly hunter dealt Steel-Coat a blow upon the head which sent him staggering back among his men. The verge of the slight fortification glittered with steel blades, and man after man was falling upon the Indian side, while the hunters, protected by the stones they had piled up as yet remained safe. If Steel-Coat had known the almost impregnable position chosen by the whites, it is doubtful whether he would have hazarded his men in the assault, but trusted rather to stratagem. The shouts of the enemy drove him wild however, and he made one more effort, seconded by the bravest of his men.

But fight as bravely as he would, he found it impossible to break through the ranks of his enemies. Their knives and hatchets rattled harmlessly upon the steel coat, but his men, who were not clad in that way, were falling about him on every side, for the whites in the rear, who could take little part in the immediate combat, which was sustained by Big Sam, Darrall and Seaton, who found themselves sufficient to keep the foe at bay, had only to load and fire as fast as they could, grievously decimating the Indians crowded into the pass below them, and who could not use their weapons on account of their comrades in front.

Such a strife could not long be maintained, and the Indians broke and fled down the pass, while Steel-Coat, with a few of his most determined warriors, covered their retreat until the interposing rocks hid them from view. The men would have followed, but were restrained by their leaders, who did not know what ambush might be laid for them at the mouth of the pass. It was not until half an hour had passed and all had become quiet, that Duke Darrall stole out to reconnoiter. He advanced cautiously; feeling his way, step by step, he passed over the spot which was cumbered by the slain Indians and reached the mouth of the pass from which he could see that the savages had already got to their horses, and were riding out to join their companions. While he yet watched them, a heavy object descended upon his head, striking him to the earth, and he lost consciousness.

The remainder of the hunters waited for some moments, and as he did not return, it was determined to march down the pass in a body and see what had become of him. When they reached the mouth of the pass they saw two Indians riding at full speed toward the band, carrying between them the senseless form of Duke Darrall.

"They laid for him among the rocks and knocked him over," groaned Big Sam. "Kain't we do suthin' for the boy? It don't seem right to let him go that ar' way."

"We can do nothing now," replied Old Avoirdupois. "The only thing for us to do is to follow, and get him out of their hands, somehow. I think we may be able to do it."

"I reckon they hev got all they want out of us," said Big

Sam. "They won't trouble us again, but, why did we let Duke go away? I'll never forgive myself ef he's gone under."

"I hope for better things," replied Avoirdupois. "The young fellow has a cool head, and if he is not too badly hurt, it is a good bet that he shakes them off somehow. And, in order that he may be able to do it, we must be near to help."

As he spoke, one of the Indians dismounted and assisted Duke to reach the ground, and they saw that he could walk, though feebly enough, supported by the two Indians. As he reached the band, Steel-Coat hurried forward and exchanged a few words with him, and then snatching the white flag from the earth where it had remained since Wina had returned with it, he placed it in her hand and pointed toward the hunter's refuge. Wina appeared to hesitate, and refused to go, but after a little, she rode out reluctantly and was met by the now acknowledged leaders of the whites in nearly the same place as before. The face of the girl was sad and there were tears in her eyes as she met them.

"My father has sent me to you again," she said. "He hates the big hunter, and will have him if it costs half the blood of his tribe. The heart of Wina is very sad because you let the young warrior fall into the trap that was laid for him."

"I didn't want him to go," replied Sam. "Is he badly hurt?"

"No; he was struck down by a war-club, but he will be well soon. My father has sent this message by me, and I must give it: 'The white hunters have with them one who is hated by Steel-Coat; Steel-Coat has taken a young warrior who is loved by them. Let the white men give up the man who is called James Seaton, to the Apache, and the young warrior shall go free.'"

"You hear that ar', Old Avoirdupois?" said Big Sam. "Now did you ever hear the like in all your life? Does the big thief think he's harnessed a lot of heathen that don't know what's right an' what's wrong? Duke Darrall would die afore he'd 'low any sech exchange."

"Still I can not bear to let the boy suffer for my sake," said Old Avoirdupois. "There is some strange mystery here, for how should the Apache know my true name? Did you tell him, little girl?"

"No; my father knows you, and hates the very sound of your name."

"Then he'd light a fire round you in ten minnits by the clock arter he'd got you," said Big Sam. "It can't be did, not ef I know it. What will he do with Duke Darrall, ef we don't make the exchange?"

"He says he will take him out upon the prairie and light the death-fire around him while you look on and see him die. If James Seaton comes, he promises that he shall not die until they reach the Apache village."

"Wants to make a barbecue of me there so as to have a good many witnesses," said Seaton. "I don't like the prospect, but I'll take the risk rather than suffer Darrall to die. Tell your father, girl—"

"Shut up!" roared Big Sam. "I won't stand it, and that's the end of it! Go back to yer father, gal, and tell him that Sam Sully, Big Sam, of the old Green 'river, the roaring old tearer, will foller him all through the Injun kentry ef he lays a hand on Duke Darrall, and hev his life."

"Threats will not frighten Steel-Coat," replied the girl. "He will burn the young warrior if the big hunter does not go, but he must first bind Wina with cords, for she will not stand by and see it done."

"I've no doubt you would do any thing in your power to help him," said Old Avoirdupois. "There is only one way to save him, Sam. Shake hands, old fellow, and bid me good-by, for I'm going to the Indian camp."

"I'll be everlastingly doggoned ef you do any thing of the kind," replied Sam. "It seems he's got to hev a roast, so go to your father, gal, an' tell him that old Sam is ready; fire won't hurt him, bless you."

"Steel-Coat would not give the young warrior for all the rest unless he can have the big hunter," said Wina. "Why need I go back to him with the words of the white man, since he will not listen?"

"Shake hands," said the brave man, clasping the strong hand of Big Sam, in his. "We have lived a long time as friends, and now the time has come to part. Tush; cheer up, man. They give me three days to work, and if in that time I don't set myself free, then I deserve to burn."

"Will the chief keep his word with us, Wina?" he continued, turning to the Indian girl. "He has lost many scalps."

"He will think them cheaply lost if he can get the big hunter in his power," she replied.

"But will not the warriors be angry?"

"They are tired of fighting with American hunters. Mexicans they can fight, and win the battle, but your men shoot too straight."

"I reckon that the gal is right," said Sam, "but I hate or fully to give you up. Something mout turn up so that we could not help you."

"The big hunter will have one friend," said Wina. "The Indian girl can not forget that he spoke kind words to her, and if she can she will help him."

"Wait here a moment while I go back and see the rest of the boys," said Seaton. "I may never see them again."

The parting between this gallant man and his prairie friends, when they understood his object in giving himself up to the Apache, was very touching. Strong men who had not known what it was to shed tears since boyhood, wiped the moisture from their eyes as he wrung their hands at parting. Captain Jim, who was an affectionate boy, threw his arms about his new friend's neck, sobbing as if his heart would break.

"Go back to your father, my girl," said the self-sacrificing man, "and tell him I am coming and he must be prepared to set my young friend at liberty."

She was weeping bitterly, but at his order she turned her horse and put him to his speed, and was by her father's side in a moment. He listened to her report attentively, and gave some order to his men in a low tone. Two of them brought forward Duke Darrall, still dizzy from the effects of the stunning blow which he had received. He was met by Steel-Coat, who still kept his face concealed, and who asked him in English how he felt.

"I don't know as that need make any difference to you," replied Duke, who was angry with himself for being trapped so easily. "Do you call me in order to tell me that I am in your power?"

"I have not called you for that," replied the chief, in a

deep voice. "There is one among the white men whom I hate, and who is willing to give his life for yours. When he comes you shall be set free."

"Look hyar, chief," said Crowing Tom, coming forward with a look of rage upon his dark face, "you don't mean to let him go, do you?"

"When the white man is asked to speak, Steel-Coat will tell him so," replied the chief, haughtily. "My brother forgets that a word from the chief will be enough to light a fire around one who has too loud a voice."

"But look hyar, chief. He tried to hang me, that chap did, and I reckon he'd 'a' done it but fur Big Sam."

"Let my brother stand back," said Steel-Coat, laying his hand upon the breast of the traitor. "Does he not wish to see the man whose ball is in his body?"

"Is he the one?"

"It is spoken."

"Then I say no more now, but I'll meet you, Duke Darrall, and then I'll have revenge."

Darrall answered by a look of contempt, and then turned to the chief.

"Who is the man who has given his life for mine? It can not be the man known as Old Avoirdupois?"

Steel-Coat inclined his head slowly by way of reply.

"I will not suffer it," cried Darrall. "If any one is to suffer for my foolishness, I am the one; I insist upon it."

At a signal from the chief, he was seized by two strong men and dragged away. His eye dwelt upon the beautiful face of Wina, and saw there a mixed feeling, of joy at his deliverance, and sorrow for the means to be employed. The Indians forced him across the plain on foot, accompanied by Steel-Coat, and were met half-way by a similar party, consisting of Seaton, Big Sam and Captain Jim.

"This can not be done, Sam," cried Darrall, as they met. "Do not permit this good man to die for me."

"Thar's no help fur it," replied Sam. "Ef you don't come away he'll give himself up anyhow, so you'd better come along."

"Have no fears for me, my brave young friend," said Seaton. "I have confidence to believe that I am not fated to

die by the torture. Farewell, and if any thing should happen, remember that I gave myself up willingly for your sake. I am ready, chief."

He was seized and dragged aside, while Darrall was set at liberty.

"Chief," hissed Sam, in a strange whisper, "if that man dies, remember that Kentucky Sam will never leave you till you are dead. Good-by, old man. God bless you."

So they parted. Would they ever meet again?

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

THERE was but little murmuring on the part of the Apache band when their chief decided to fight no more against so hard-headed and sharp-sighted a party as this, where nothing was to be gained except hard knocks, most of which came from the wrong side. He seemed to have accomplished the main object he sought in the capture of Old Avordupois, and that he valued him highly was evident from the manner in which he was watched. A strong lariat was passed four times about his body, and then twice about the horse, from thence descending to the feet, linking them loosely together at the ankles. His hands were drawn back and held in such a manner that while they were free to hold the bridle, he could not use them to touch any of the knots upon the rope. Four lariats were attached to the one about his waist, the ends of which were held by as many mounted savages, so that to escape was a physical impossibility.

"You seem to think a good deal of me, boys," said the prairie-man, quietly. "Had you not better put another lariat or two on? These might not be enough, you know."

Crowing Tom, who was riding near him with his arm in a sling, turned upon him fiercely.

"Hold yer hush, will yer!" he hissed, "or I'll slap you in

the face. You ar' the one that bored this yer hole in my shoulder, ain't ye? I'll fix yer flint, you heathen."

"Keep your temper, keep your temper, Crowing Tom. I know you of old, you scoundrel, and since the day you were the toady and dirt-eater of Rodger Bacon, to this hour, you have been little better than a consummate fool and coward."

"Rodger Bacon! You'd better not speak of him in that way, my fat old friend. He was too many for you in the end."

"I wish I could meet him once, and I would show him how good a friend I could be to him," replied Seaton, quietly. "He was a bloody-minded vagabond, and like a serpent, bit the hand which warined him into life. There; I won't waste words upon a low thief, so let it pass."

In a transport of rage, Crowing Tom rode up to the bound man, and with his unwounded hand, struck him in the face. Bound as he was, the hunter could not return the blow, but he managed to requite it in a way for which the other had not looked. Throwing himself forward in the saddle, he plunged his head into the bosom of the insulter, and literally drove him from the saddle, rolling him over and over upon the grass. He alighted upon his wounded shoulder, and uttered a shriek of agony as he felt the wound reopen. There was a universal shout of delight among the Indians, at the spirited manner in which the white man had repaid the insult, for the Indian, stoical as he may appear, is not without a sense of humor upon certain points.

Two or three sprung down and assisted the fallen traitor to arise, but the blood was welling from his wounded shoulder again, and it was some time before they could stanch it. He cast a malevolent glance at the man who had injured him, and if he had not been so weakened by loss of blood, and unable to raise a weapon, it is doubtful whether the career of Old Avoirdupois would have gone further. As it was, Crowing Tom made a frantic effort to draw a pistol, but his hand dropped heavily to his side, and he fell into the arms of the Indians who surrounded him.

When the blood had ceased to flow, he was lifted into the saddle, and at a word from the chief, the band moved slowly

across the plain, accommodating their pace to the enfeebled condition of their new ally. The rangers had come out of the pass, and were watching them closely, noting the direction in which they went, and saw them disappear in the course which led toward the principal Apache village.

"Now, then, boys," said Big Sam, turning to his men, "you are free moral agents, every man of yer, and kin do as yer like. But I axes yer, shill that man be 'lowed to make a barbecue fur them cussid red niggers?"

"What kin we do, Sam?" asked one of the men.

"Foller and watch. Thar's heaps of ways to git a man out of the claws of the heathen, and you just bet we'll find that way. We ain't got nothin' partic'lar to do, now that the wagins is gone, so I reckin we'll send one man to the fort, to let the curnel know what's come to the wagins, and then put out arter Old Avoirdupois."

A difficulty which had been unforeseen by the speaker now arose among the men. A life of danger had its peculiar charms for them, and the strife now arose as to who should take the easy duty of returning to the fort, leaving his companions to follow the Apache. Each man was eager to make one of the party, for it would take them into a country new to them, where they might gain knowledge which would be of service in the wild life of a trapper.

"Shut up, you grannies!" roared Big Sam. "Here: I'll make this right in a minnit. The man that goes back shill hev a fair share in every thing we strike except the fun. It's hard on you to lose *that*, but somebody's got to go."

"Draw cuts," said one of the men. "Leave out the boy—for he won't be parted from Big Sam—and let the rest take their chaince."

"I must go," said Duke Darrall, in a hurried manner. "You must remember that this brave man is in danger for my sake, and that I must aid him."

"All right; we'll leave you out, and you must cut the straws."

Duke pulled up a handful of grass and cut them of different lengths, eight in number, and came back holding them in his hand.

"Now, let's understand it, boys," cried the man who had

proposed drawing cuts. "The man that gets the shortest straw goes back."

The rest agreed, and began to pull the pieces of grass, one by one, from the hand of Duke Darrall. The last one was drawn by the unlucky fellow who had proposed this plan, and was the shortest of the lot.

"Thar, blame my cats ef I ain't pulled the short one," he growled. "Well, boys, luck is ag'in' me this time, and I've got to go. But, I'll come back, and mebbe bring three or four boys with me, and you must leave sign to guide me wharever yoa go."

He mounted his horse in rather a sulky mood, looked to his weapons, and, bidding them good-by, took a course for the fort.

"That job's done," said Sam, drawing a sigh of relief. "Now then, business."

The horses were got ready, and in half an hour they were far out upon the trail which the Indians had taken no pains to hide, not thinking that the bold band would dare to penetrate their country, knowing the fate in store for them if they were caught.

But, they little comprehended the character of the men upon their trail, to whom danger was the principal incentive to action.

As night came on the hunters saw the Indian smoke in front, and made a camp about a mile distant, in the midst of a thick belt of prairie timber. They lighted no fire, contenting themselves with some pemmican of which they had a supply, an article of food generally used by the northern trappers and voyageurs, as most easily packed and carried of any animal food. When all was still, Big Sam and Duke Darrall stole out on foot toward the Indian camp, after ordering Captain Jim to follow with their horses to a certain tree which they had marked as night came on, and there wait for them.

They crept up together within a hundred yards of the Apache camp and lay down in the grass to watch. From this position a wild and picturesque sight was before their eyes, but one which was not new or strange to them. The camp had been made upon the river at a point where, if

assailed by a superior force, it was easily fordable, for in every action Steel-Coat showed an aptitude in military matters hardly to be looked for in an Indian. A few scattered trees lay between the camp and the scouts, and near these stood several immovable figures, those of the sleepers' guards. Close to the river-bank, upon an expanse of smooth prairie, the horses had been picketed under a strong guard.

"Oh, the low-minded cuss knows his little bizz on a raft," whispered Big Sam, with his mouth pressed against the ear of his companion. "Look at them hosses; you kain't git at them, nohow you can fix it. Jim couldn't do it, and he's the boyee at a stampede."

Back of the sentinels they could see the clumps of lances thrust into the ground, ready to be snatched up at a moment's warning. The Indians had already lain down, with the exception of two or three who were enjoying their pipes beside the fire, and two more with rifles in their hands who seemed to be watching over a dark object extended upon the earth. Big Sam touched his companion and they crept back to a place where they could converse without being heard.

"Tain't no use, Duke," he said. "Them cusses have got eyes like cats, and ears like—like the devil. I don't believe we kin do any thing until they git a little off their guard."

"They are led by a man who understands his business but too well, I am afraid," said Duke, "but we ought to do something. Hush; what is that? Down quick, Sam."

They fell prostrate in the grass, and remained silent. A rustling sound approached as of a person stealing cautiously through the thick grass, and to their surprise they saw that it was Wina. There was but one thing to do, for, woman like, she would cry out if they started up suddenly, and she would be sure to discover them if they remained where they were.

"Wina," whispered Duke.

The girl started and made a quick movement to retreat, but paused as the young hunter repeated her name, as if she recognized the voice.

"Darrall," she whispered, bending forward. "Does the young white hunter speak?"

Darrall showed himself for a moment and without a word

she passed by, never looking at them. They arose and crept after her in silence until they were so far from the camp that no danger was to be apprehended, when she paused and waited for them.

" You talk to her, Duke," whispered Big Sam, " and I'll keep watch."

The keen old prairie-man could see that the handsome young man would have more influence over her than he could have, and wisely left it to him. She stood there with downcast eyes, her hands folded before her, but looking more beautiful than ever in the silvery moonlight. Duke Darrall's heart gave a great throb, and for a moment he forgot his mission in the intoxication of her beauty.

" Wina knew that the white hunters would come," she said, softly, " but she feared that they would be too fast. Steel-Coat has an eye which never sleeps when he is upon the war-path, and the white men must not rouse him now."

" We were only scouting a little, just to see how the land lay," replied Darrall; " but it would be of no use to assail that camp, guarded as it is."

" Wina does not know what is right and what is wrong. The chief, her father, has been very kind to her, and she loves him; but the hunter who is a prisoner has spoken kind words to the Indian girl, and she would not see him die."

" Will the chief keep him until he gets to the Apache country? He may choose to kill him before."

" No; the white hunter will not die until he has told a secret in the ear of my father. When he has spoken, he will be killed."

" Then he had better not speak."

The beautiful girl shuddered.

" The Indians have strange and cruel tortures, and they will make him speak. Let my white friend listen to the words of Wina. Do not strike the camp of Steel-Coat until the Indian country has been reached, and then I will give you help. Let me return; they will look for me, and you will die."

" Do not go yet," said Duke, in a pleading tone. " I may never see you again, and my heart tells me that I can not

bear that. Tell me: do you remember your youth? Are you *sure* that you are of Apache blood?"

"All is dark before my eyes when I look back," she replied. "There are times when I dream, but the vision is clouded, and the Indian girl can not understand it. Yes, Wina is—she must be—the daughter of Steel-Coat."

"But your mother was not an Indian," replied Duke. "Look among the Indian girls and tell me if there is one who has your hair and eyes, and whose face is as white as yours? Try to think: was not your mother a white woman?"

The girl shook her head sadly. "My mother? Wina does not know her mother, and has never seen the place of her rest. Let me go, white man. Why do you torture me by such questions as these?"

"Because I would prove that Steel-Coat is not your father, and that you are of my race, not of the Apache. I love you, Wina."

She tore her hand away with a quick start, and waving him a farewell, darted away toward the camp. But she had hardly taken a dozen steps, when she turned and ran back toward them, with terror imprinted upon her beautiful face. A fearful tumult had suddenly arisen in the Indian camp, and they could hear wild exclamations, shrieks, trampling, the neighing of horses and other strange sounds. Big Sam, who was a little nearer the camp, stopped to listen.

"What is it?" whispered Duke.

"Something has startled them."

"Wait," replied Big Sam. "Ha! Heel it, Duke. Hyar's hot pitch arter us. A stampede, and comin' this way! Run for it, or by the mortal snakes, we ar' done fur."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLAZING STAR.

A STAMPEDE!

The word has no significance to those who have never mingled in the wild life of the prairie or understand its peculiar dangers. A firebrand hurled into the midst of a herd of frightened horses, the breaking of a lariat, the sudden and unexpected discharge of a rifle—any of these causes are sufficient to work great evil to a party upon the plains. The mustangs seem possessed of the devil, and the hand of man is powerless to restrain them. The cause which had made the stampede in the Indian camp was unknown to the hunters, but they could judge by the sound it was universal, and the Indians were running wildly about, striving to repair the mischief done.

"Which way, Sam?" cried Duke, seizing the hand of Winona firmly in his. "I can't leave this poor girl, you know, to be trampled under foot."

"Foller me!" cried the old guide. "Don't you be afraid she kain't keep up with you, my boy; I'll bet on her."

The tumult now increased, and they could hear the mob of frightened mustangs crossing the plain, scattered in every direction, and they hardly knew which way to turn. The moon, which had been shining brightly for some time, was now out of sight behind the mountains, and their course lay in darkness. But, that old prairie guide had set his face in the direction in which he wished to go, and nothing could make him swerve or turn aside. Close behind them the tumult grew louder; they might be trampled under foot at any moment, and their only hope lay in reaching the trees where Captain Jim had been told to wait, or in the approach of some object which would turn the demoralized brutes from their course. How Kentucky Sam cursed the luck which obliged him to give up the chance of rushing into the Indian camp in the confusion, and setting James Seaton free, as he

might have done if he had only known that this stampede would occur.

"*Leg it, I say!*" he cried, as the uproar grew louder.
"Cuss the luck; we kain't git to the trees."

As he spoke, a dark body of horses, with tossing manes and distended nostrils, dashed upon them. There was a chance for the active prairie-men, had they not been hampered by the girl, but they determined to save her at all hazards. As the wild body came on, and a few of the scattered leaders rushed past them, Big Sam made a leap and alighted upon the nearest mustang, grasping the dangling lariat as he sprung from the ground, and by a single effort of his powerful arm checking its furious course. No need to tell Duke Darrall what to do in a moment like this, for, seizing Wina by the waist, he placed her on the plunging mustang and bade her cling to the old guide for life or death.

He had hardly done this when the herd was upon him in a compact body, and he saw that only by the utmost exertion he could save himself from being thrown down and trampled under foot, and to fall *there* was death! Doubling himself for the leap, he sprung from the earth and alighted on the backs of the nearest mustangs who were running so close together that it was impossible to fall between them. In that awkward position he coolly felt about until he had his hand upon a lariat coiled about the neck of the animal upon which his body rested, and dragging himself to a standing position, felt comparatively safe. The mustang did not take kindly to the burden on his back, and strove in every way to free himself from his rider, but the animals were so closely packed now that he found it impossible. To add to Duke's discomfort, a vicious black, which was running with his nose over the haunches of the animal which Duke rode, kept reaching out and taking hold of his hunting-shirt in a disagreeable manner. In vain he tried to force the animal out of the press, but having nothing to guide him except the lariat, he found it impossible. Something must be done soon, for the Indians had recovered part of their horses and were riding hard to overtake the rest, and Duke had no desire for a better acquaintance with them in their present mood. Still clinging to the horse by means of his knees, he drew up the end

of the lariat and managed to cut off enough to make a halter, which his dextrous fingers quickly knotted together, even in the darkness, and stooping forward he passed it over the animal's head, and passing the loose end through the nose-piece on the left side, a moment's work formed it into a very good substitute for a bridle, minus the bit. Then he sat up with a sigh of relief, feeling once more at home. Like most prairie-men, he rode quite as well without a saddle as with one, and was satisfied that he could now escape from the enemy if they should come suddenly upon him.

The first thing to do was to free himself from the herd, and he began to strike out right and left with his knife to teach the mustangs to keep at a respectful distance, at the same time urging the one he rode into the opening thus made. He worked cautiously, for he knew that if the natural viciousness of the mustangs should be aroused against him, they would tear him limb from limb, and he breathed more freely when he found that nearly all had passed him, and that he was among a few scattered stragglers in the rear. By this time the mustang began to comprehend that he was in the hands of a master, and to obey the touch of his guiding hand, and turned to the right in the direction of the trees in which the rangers had taken refuge.

He had hardly done so, when two horsemen rode up on either side, and a harsh voice which he recognized as that of Steel-Coat called to him in the Indian tongue to ride on after the flying mustangs. In the darkness, it was impossible for them to distinguish figures, and rather than give them any cause for suspicion or to lead them in the direction of the place in which his friends were concealed, he turned his horse and rode on with them, apparently at the top of his speed but in reality pulling hard upon the rope bridle and gradually dropping behind. Steel-Coat looked back at him once or twice, and Duke had about made up his mind to turn his mustang and plunge into the darkness, when he found himself surrounded upon every side by the Indians who were struggling up as fast as they could pick up a horse. It was a trying position in which he was placed, for at any moment a man might come up with a torch, and that would betray him at once.

He controlled himself with an effort, and rode on by the side of the chief, who did not speak to him again. By this time they were satisfied that all the horses which could possibly be recovered had been taken, and that it was best to wait for daylight before attempting to follow the rest, and the party began to ride slowly back toward the camp. Among the last rode Duke Darrall, the chief and one or two of his best warriors, and Duke knew that if he escaped it must be before they came within the circle of the camp-fire, which now was seen in front, and he began to lag a little, hoping that the others would pass him. The two warriors did so, but Steel-Coat, seeing him halt, rode close to him and passed his hand quickly over his person, until it came in contact with the black belt about his waist, which he knew none of his warriors wore. He uttered a cry of surprise, and the next moment was rolling in the grass under a terrible blow dealt him by Duke, who whirled his mustang and was off like the wind in the darkness before the chief could regain his feet and satisfy the warriors who returned, of the presence of an enemy. When this was done, they searched vainly about the prairie, for Duke, after riding a few hundred yards, turned back and reached the river, along the bank of which he rode for half a mile before again trusting himself upon the plain. Steel-Coat recalled his men, and having secured his horse, rode back in moody silence to his camp, where he found all in confusion.

"Let the chief listen," said one of the principal warriors, advancing. "While the big hunter lives there is no safety for the Apache. Let us take him out, and burn him with fire."

"My brother speaks with the mouth of one who is not wise," replied Steel-Coat, thus politely calling the other a fool. "Why should we burn him until the Apache can see the light of the death-fire, and hear his dying groans?"

"Manabo has seen visions," replied the Indian. "There is a star in the sky which was not there before, and it is not good for the Indians to look upon it; see."

He led the chief aside, and pointed to the sky from which the clouds had suddenly passed away, and there, blazing in resplendent splendor, was that object of terror to the untutored

mind, a comet. Steel-Coat looked at it calmly, but with a secret fear that his warriors would take alarm from their natural superstition, and refuse to obey him.

"Let the warriors come about me," he said, "and listen to the words of a chief. You have seen the mark which the Great Spirit has set in the sky and your hearts are heavy. Why should the Indian fear more than the white man? The same star which we see they also behold, and their hearts do not turn to water, for, they know that the Great Spirit makes his stars do his will. Call up the big hunter, and let us hear what he says."

Old Avoardupois, who through all the confusion had not been deserted by his guards and hence had no opportunity to effect his escape, now appeared, led forward by his guards.

"Why do you send for me?" he said.

"Look at the blazing star and tell the warriors what it means," said Steel Coat.

Old Avoardupois cast a look about the circle of attentive faces. His ears had been active, and he knew enough of the Indian tongue to understand that the warrior who had been talking with Steel-Coat desired his death immediately, to which, for some reason, Steel-Coat objected, and he was not so anxious for a fearful death as to balk the chief's design.

"I can read the stars," he cried, in a solemn voice, "and have heard them when they sing together. The blazing star is a token that the Great Spirit is angry with the Apache, because they shed too much blood, and kill his white children. For all, white and red, are the children of the same Great Father, and he loves them both."

"The white man speaks lies," cried Manabo, fiercely. "He would save himself from the fire, and speaks lies in the ears of the Apache, who are dogs if they listen to his words. See, the Great Spirit is angry because we have let the Big Hunter live so long, after he has slain so many of the Apache. Let us burn him, and the star will go out of the sky."

"Does my brother know the stars?" said Seaton, sneeringly. "Can he read them, and make them obey his words? Can he make a star fall out of the sky?"

"Manabo is not the Great Spirit; he can not do this," replied the Indian.

"Then let him retire before one who is powerful. I can make a star fall from the sky."

He lifted his hand in an impressive gesture, and waited. He had noted that, for the last few nights, the fall of meteors had been very frequent, and he was satisfied that, before many moments had passed, another would fall. If it did not, he was only in the position of other false prophets, and must suffer the consequences. But his hopes were answered in a way for which even he had not looked, for a strange light began to glow, which grew brighter and more unearthly as it proceeded—a pale, flickering, phosphorescent gleam, which shed its radiance upon the surrounding plain, and a strange meteor sailed by over their heads, proceeding toward the east. It consisted of three balls of blue fire, following one another closely, and moving, with unexampled velocity, across the plain.

The Indians stood awe-struck, and Old Avoirdupois, although himself somewhat startled, pointed to the phenomenon as it passed. Suddenly, there was a tremendous explosion, and the darkness became greater than ever.

"Will my brothers believe now that a prophet has power?" asked Seaton, in a solemn voice. "Behold the star!"

Most of the Indians had fallen on their faces to the earth, shielding their eyes from the intense glare. Even Manabo bowed his head and was silent; but Steel-Coat stood erect, with his arms folded on his breast, watching the course of the meteor through the openings in his visor.

"My brother is a great prophet," he said, *in English*, in a slightly contemptuous tone. "Use your power to save yourself from the flames!"

"Ha!" said Old Avoirdupois, "where have I heard that voice before?"

"No matter. It is my wish that you live for some days yet. The Apache will not kill you while they think you have such power; so see that you use it well."

The prisoner came nearer, and tried to catch a glimpse of the face of the speaker through its covering, but was pulled back by his guards, who had not taken their eyes from him for a moment. The Indians were too thoroughly frightened

to think of destroying Old Avoirdupois now, for there is no more superstitious race upon the earth than the native American.

"It is enough," said Steel-Coat, in the Apache tongue. "You see that the Big Hunter is a great medicine, and must not be harmed now. When the time comes, he must suffer; but the Apache nation must be there to see."

Seaton was removed, and again placed in the uncomfortable position he had occupied before, flat upon his back, with ropes stretched from his ankles and wrists, and attached to stakes driven in the ground. Having seen him safely disposed of, Steel-Coat turned to one of his men and asked if he had seen Wina in the confusion of the night. The man went away to look for her, and came back with a frightened face.

"Ha, Dah-la-too," cried Steel-Coat, "where is the daughter of the chief?"

The man shook his head by way of reply, and with a howl of rage Steel-Coat sprung to the spot where his daughter had lain down to rest, as night came on. Her blanket lay upon the soft grass, but she was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER EXCHANGE.

WHATEVER the crimes of the Apache chief, it was known that he had an almost idolatrous devotion for the young girl who called him father. For her sake he had endured many privations and had risked life and limb oftentimes to do her good. He knew nothing of the meeting with Duke Darrall and Sam upon the prairie, and yet, in some way, he ascribed the loss of his child to the influence of the man whom he had met during the night of the stampede, and he was confident it could be only a portion of the band of rangers who had already given him so much trouble. Torches were procured and a search attempted, but the recent stampede had obliterated

ated all traces of a trail, and he was forced, much against his will, to wait until morning. The chief began to understand that they had taken a leaf from his own book, and if the rangers had indeed taken her, they would never give her up except on the condition that Old Avoirdupois should be set at liberty. He ground his teeth in a transport of passion wholly at variance with the Indian character generally; started up and walked to and fro; sat down again, tried to sleep, but in vain. At last he sprung up and went to the place where the prisoner lay.

"Look you," said Old Avoirdupois. "I'll stand a great deal but if you trouble me any more I'll make you see more stars than you ever saw before."

"Silence, white man. What has been done with Wina, the pride of the chief's heart?"

"Now that's a foolish question to ask me, Steel-Coat. Have I not been laid by the heels in such a way that I can only look up at the stars and wish you in a warmer climate than this? How should I know any thing about your daughter?"

"Wina is gone; she has been stolen away by your friends."

"Ha! you don't tell me that? Then, Mr. Steel-Coat, it's my opinion that they will keep your daughter until I am set free."

"Dog!" screamed the chief, "this was your plan when you came to me and gave yourself up."

"Not a bit of it! If the girl has fallen into the hands of my friends—mind, I don't say she has or has not—it is a piece of good luck for me, since while she is a prisoner you dare not harm me. I've had an eye upon you and I can see that the only redeeming point in your nature, is your love for that beautiful girl—for she is beautiful. You will notice that I speak to you in English because it comes easier to use than Indian, and you can understand me just as well."

"What do you intend to do?" cried the chief, angrily.
"When will your friends come?"

"Not knowing, I can't say. Whatever they do will be done in such a way that you can't get hold of them, for they are keen lads and know the Indian nature."

"Let them come quickly, before my anger becomes more than I can bear!" shrieked the chief, as he stalked away

"Wina must be brought back, if the whole Apache nation take the trail."

"So!" muttered the prisoner. "A new light dawns upon me. I only hope that the boys *have* taken her, for they won't hurt the girl but will make her a hostage for my safety. Let us wait and we will see what comes of it."

Morning came and such a morning as is only seen upon the southern prairies. The sun came up in splendor over the distant mountains, but long before that, the Indians were stirring and making preparations for the search after Wira, whose loss was deeply felt by every Apache, who looked with pride upon the queen of the tribe—for as such she was regarded by them. Their preparations were brought to an abrupt termination by the appearance of a horseman, who came up the river, riding in their camp in the most nonchalant manner possible, carrying a handkerchief upon the ran-rod of a rifle as a flag of truce. This cool personage was no other than our friend, Captain Jim, who seemed quite as much at his ease and as certain of his safety, as if he had been entering an American post instead of a hostile Indian camp.

"That's the pizinest little reptile in the West, Steel-Coat," whispered Crowing Tom, who was loafing around the camp, nursing his wounded shoulder, "and he is a great friend of Big Sam."

"Oh, that's *you*, is it, Crowing Tom?" said Jim, as he dismounted and looked at his saddle girth, which had been drawn a little too tight for comfort. "I thought I'd see you."

"What does the white boy seek in the Apache camp?" said Steel-Coat, coming forward.

"I'm a flag of truce," said Jim, flaunting the handkerchief before the face of the chief, "and I'm here to affect an exchange of prisoners."

"Who sent you here?"

"Big Sam and Duke Darrall, who calculate they have got the whip hand again, seeing that the gal is a prisoner in their hands. They calculate that you have kept Old Avoirdupois long enough, and they sorter insinuate that if you don't give our friend up you'll never see the girl again."

Steel-Coat clutched the haft of his knife convulsively,

and for a moment it seemed as if he would kill the boy, in spite of the flag he carried. But the lad met his fierce look firmly, and waved the handkerchief to and fro before his face.

"Don't you strike a flag, Master Injin," he said. "That ain't pretty, besides being against the law of nations, so to speak. Come out and be a man—do! There's our friend, and we want him; there's your daughter, and you want *her*. Nothing could be fairer than to make an *exchange*."

"Where are these dogs of white men?" said Steel-Coat.

"Now that is *too* thin, Steel-Coat—positively too transparent, even for blind eyes to behold. I ain't going to tell you where they are, you know."

"I can find a way to force it from you," said Steel-Coat.

"Oh, no, I guess *not*," was the quiet reply. "You've got hold of the wrong little boy, 'cause I don't scare worth a darn. Even if I was to tell you where I left them, they wouldn't be there when you got to the place. They ain't going to trust you *much*, I don't reckon."

Steel-Coat took a moment for reflection. He had a reason better known to himself than any other for hating his prisoner, and for a moment it seemed as if his desire for vengeance would overcome his paternal affection. At last, ordering the boy to remain where he was, he called a council of his principal men, who were in conference with him for some time. Then the conference broke up, and Steel Coat turned toward the young ambassador.

"The warriors love Steel-Coat so well that they are willing to give up their revenge for the sake of his child," he said. "Now tell me where Wina is."

"Never mind that, chieftain. You do the fair thing by us, and we'll do the fair thing by you. That's the time of day as near as I can cipher it out, and I'll tell you what we want you to do. Give Old Avordupois a horse and let him go away with me and you stay here in camp, and the girl shall be back before night."

"How shall I know that the white men will keep their word? When they have their friend safe they will steal Wina away and the Apache lodges will be in mourning."

"You know better than that, chieftain," said the boy. "Big Sam and Duke Darrall ain't the men to lie, I tell you."

Steel-Coat hesitated for some time, but he knew the character of the men with whom he had to deal, and at last decided to accede to their demands, and stooping over the prostrate form of Old Avoirdupois he cut the cords upon his limbs. The prisoner rose slowly, with a quizzical smile upon his face.

"Do you give me your word, you, who call yourself James Seaton, that Wina shall be sent back safe, if I let you go?"

"There's my hand upon it," replied Old Avoirdupois, extending his hand. "You have the word of a man of honor that the girl shall come back to you safe."

"Then you are free," said the chief. "And now, listen to a word of warning from one who is your enemy. The prairie is wide, and it is safer for you to dwell upon the eastern shore of the great river than upon any land upon which the Apache can get his foot. Turn your horse to the east and rest not until he drinks of the waters of the great river, for if you remain the Apache will surely hunt you down."

"I'm a great deal like this boy in respect to getting scared," replied Old Avoirdupois, "and I'll do as I like about leaving the country. Every thing bearing the name of Apache is an object of hatred to me, and I shall not give up my pursuit of them until my revenge is complete."

"Steel-Coat has no more to say," replied the chief, as one of his men brought forward a horse. "Give him the rifle and let him go."

The favorite weapon of the hunter together with his ball-pouch and powder-flask, were now brought forward, and wreathing his hand in the horse's mane he leaped lightly upon the horse, a feat which would have troubled many a lighter man. The Indians stood scowling about him, furious that their prey should escape them, but seeing no way to stop him without danger to the pride of the Apache.

"You are a durned fool, Steel-Coat," bawled Crowing Tom. "They ain't such fools as to send the gal back when they git him safe into camp."

"A liar and traitor judges other men by himself," replied the chief, coolly. "James Seaton will keep his word."

"I am very glad you are willing to do me justice," said Seaton. "Your daughter shall be treated as kindly as if she were my own child, and returned to you at once."

The chief silently waved his hand as a token for them to proceed, and the rescued man, accompanied by the boy, rode rapidly across the plain. Seeing several Indian scouts start out as if to follow them, the two halted and seemed about to return, when Steel-Coat called back his men, who came in sullenly, casting furious glances after the retreating figures of their enemies.

They rode on in silence for some time, until a ridge arose between them and their enemies, shutting them out from the view of the camp upon the river, when Old Avoirdupois slackened his pace and extended his hand to his young friend.

"Nobly and bravely done, Captain Jim!" he said. "But for you, I should have remained a prisoner for weeks, and perhaps have suffered a terrible death. How did Wina happen to be taken?"

"See here, Avoirdupois," said the boy, "you've got to thank the girl for your safety more than any one else. You see, she came out of their camp last night to tell us where you were, and how the chances stood, and about that time I managed to make a stampede among their horses. You see, I got into the bushes along the river, with a piece of tow soaked in spirits, lighted it and threw it among the horses, and away they went. You'd have laughed if you could have seen it, I'll bet a dollar! Wina was out on the plain, and as it turned out, the old man and Duke had a hard time saving her from being tramped under foot by the mustangs; but, Big Sam got to a horse some way, took the girl up before him, and got away. Duke came near getting nabbed after that, but he bowled Steel-Coat over and put out, and they couldn't follow because it was so dark."

"Then it was an accident which threw the girl into their hands?" said Seaton. "I don't like this; it wasn't fair, taking into consideration the reason she was there, to make her a prisoner."

"So we all thought," replied the boy, eagerly, "and I don't think we would have done it anyhow, if it hadn't been for

the girl herself. Duke Darrall was for letting her go at once, but she wouldn't hear of it. You see, she knew that her father and the rest of the Apaches set a heap by her, and wouldn't stop at any thing to get her back, and so she told us to keep her, and offer to exchange for you."

"That is better," said Old Avoirdupois, breathing more freely. "I wouldn't consent to be set free at her expense."

"Then she told us to act as if we would do all manner of things if they didn't give you up, and threaten them awful, or they might think we would let her go, as of course, we would had they refused to come down."

"It was well planned," said the hunter, "and I have much to be thankful for in having so many good friends. Where are the boys camped now?"

"They are on the other side of the river, for we crossed over last night and went down about ten miles after we had made up our minds what to do. Ain't Duke Darrall sweet on that gal? I calculate not, he ain't! Oh no!"

"He must be careful, he must be careful," said Seaton. "I will have no trifling with the affections of that untutored child, who deserves the love of any noble man."

"You don't know Duke, I guess. He'd cut his hand off at the wrist before he would suffer it to do her a wrong—you bet on *that*. Stir up that mustang a little; he ain't quite up to your weight."

"I hope you have got my horse safe," said Seaton, eagerly.

"*You bet!* That's the all-firedest hoss I ever saw in my born days. One or two of the boys tried to ride him, but, bless you, he wouldn't have any fooling of that kind, so we had to lead him. He's a knowing old cuss."

They were now passing through a belt of timber about five miles below the Indian camp, and were forced to proceed slowly. Once clear of the bushes, they got upon the grass, and reached a ford, into which they plunged and were soon safely on the other side. Ten minutes' ride brought them to the rangers' camp, which was in a deep gully formed by the dry bed of an ancient stream. They were greeted with uproarious shouts as they approached, and the whole party came spurring out to meet them. The greeting of

these wild but good-hearted men touched the hunter to the quick, and, as he returned their welcome, he was conscious of a womanish feeling about the heart.

"Now whar d'ye git yer boys?" roared Big Sam, as he caught Captain Jim in his arms and raised him from the saddle. "Show me his ekal, that's all—show me his ekal! He's done it, by the bones of old Pharo, he's done it, and Old Avoirdupois is safe!"

Duke Darrall was not so demonstrative as the old hunter, but he greeted the returned captive warmly.

"I have not known a really happy hour since you went away, James Seaton," he said, "until this moment. Here is one you must thank; but for her goodness, this never could have been done with my consent."

"And no more it didn't oughter," said Big Sam. "You see—"

"Jim has told me all about it, old friend," said Seaton, "and I quite agree with you that the girl should not have been detained against her will."

Avoirdupois dismounted and took both hands of the noble girl in his.

"You've got a heart which contains only a fountain of pure thoughts, my dear child. I wish you were my daughter, for this life is not suited to your nature. I had children who, if they had lived, would have been about your age, but the deadly hatchet of the Apache robbed me at once of wife and children. I will not talk of that, for it drives me wild, and I can think only of revenge."

"My father has had great wrongs," said Wina, softly, "and the Indian girl is glad to have served him. Now her work is done and she will go away; but her friends must not forget her."

"Forget you!" said Old Avoirdupois, with a sly glance at Duke Darrall's face. "There is a young man who won't forget you soon, I'm thinking."

The parting was a sad one, and need not be described. For the first time in her life, Wina had known what it was to enjoy the society of people whom she could love; for her mind was far above the rude and superstitious race with which her years had been passed. Duke rode with her a little way, and

assisted her through the ford, and would have gone further, but she ordered him to return.

"We part here," she said softly. "When you go back to your friends, who live in the great world, of which poor Wina has only dreamed, and sit in their houses, and talk of these days, do not forget the poor Indian girl in her lonely life."

"You must not go," said Duke. "Come with me to the home of which you speak, and I promise you that a woman as noble as yourself will be a mother to you, and teach you all that you have lost in this strange life."

"Would you make James Seaton a liar, my friend? He gave his hand to my father, and promised that I should go safe to the Apache camp. Do not make me believe that your friendship is only a name, for what you ask can never be."

"Surely you do not love this life; you must aspire to something better, higher, nobler—"

"I have dreamed my dreams," replied Wina; "but I have awakened, and see that the ignorant girl of the prairie would be lost in strange places. Let me go!"

"You do not care for me, then?" he cried, wildly; "and I—I love you so!"

She looked him full in the face with those clear, innocent eyes, and saw that he spoke the truth. More than this, it was the love of an honorable man, and would endure until the end. Her glance fell before his, a moment, and then, removing a little golden chain about her neck, with a small locket attached, she put it into his hand.

"Take it," she said. "My father gave it to me when I was a little child, and I have worn it always, night and day. I think it has brought a blessing with it, for when my father opens it and looks at the face within, his own face is more gentle than at any other time. Keep it, and remember me."

"And let me give you this," he said, hastily detaching a heavy ring from his little finger. "There, I have put it on, and my name is on the inner face. It will sometimes make you think of me when I am far away."

She raised her hand with the ring upon it, and looked at it mournfully.

Remember that they were young—he so bold and handsome, and she beautiful as a dream—and had never known

what it was to love. They did not know but the parting was forever; indeed, there was little hope that they would ever meet again.

"I will keep it always," she said; "and it will be pleasant to remember that Wina was of some use to the white man. Good by."

She caught his hand, pressed her lips upon it, and was gone.

He called upon her to return, but she rode on with bent head, the tears dropping from her beautiful eyes, and he remained standing, like one transfixed, until the belt of woods along the river concealed her from his gaze.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE FORBES.—OLD AVOIRDUPOIS IN DANGER.

DUKE Darrall rode back to the camp of the prairie voyagers with a strange feeling in his breast, moody and sad. He had not thought that the time would ever come when he would find it so hard to part from a simple forest beauty, who had successfully resisted women with the added charms of education and dress, but it was even so. He felt that a great void had been left in his heart by the loss of Wina and he did not know which way to turn, or what to do. The restless feeling prompted him to follow her, to give up all for her sake, to become one of her father's followers and war against his own race for her sweet self. More than this has been done and will be done by man again for the woman he loves, but Duke Darrall knew that Wina would despise him if he turned traitor to his faith, and he came back, looking at the little trinket she had given him, which still hung upon his neck, where she had placed it.

"Oh look hyar, boys," cried Kentucky Sam, "this durned boy's an out and outer, he is. Just you see what the gal hez given him."

"Mind your own affairs, will you, Big Sam," said Duke,

rather sullenly, as he thrust the locket into the breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt, "and I'll attend to mine."

"Will you favor me with a look at that locket, Duke?" asked Old Avoirdupois eagerly, coming forward.

"I have no objection whatever," replied Duke, "but Kentucky Sam is enough to drive a saint mad. There it is, Seaton."

As the hunter took the little golden toy in his hand, all noticed that his face was pale, and his usually firm lips trembling with ill-suppressed excitement. The hand that held the locket trembled like an aspen-leaf, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in opening the little case, and as he saw the face pictured there, he uttered a rapturous cry, and pressed his lips upon it again and again, while the tears actually started from his eyes.

"Found, found, found!" he cried, "the last relic which her dear hands touched in life before she fell under the hatchets of the Apache! Young man, as I live, this is the picture of my murdered wife, to obtain which I would almost have sacrificed my own life. It is hard to ask you to sell it or give it—"

"Money will not buy it," replied Duke.

"Will you not let me have it?" pleaded the unhappy man. "It is yours now by right, but *do not* take it from me."

"There, there, old friend," said Duke, "give me the chain, because it would be ungallant in me to part with it, given as a pledge of friendship by a beautiful woman. But keep the locket if you will, and I am sure Wina will forgive me if we ever meet again, when I tell her who claimed it."

"I am your friend for life or death," cried Seaton, clasping the young man by the hand. "Yes, yes, you shall have the chain, if I may only keep the locket."

He detached the little oval case from the chain and handed the latter to Duke, while he pressed the locket to his lips again, and then went aside to gaze upon the features of his loved wife. When he came back he had concealed the locket somewhere about his person, and his face was pale again.

"For many years," he said, "I have searched for the man who led the party which killed my wife, and my vengeance will not be complete until he is dead. Did the Indian girl

tell you the name of the person from whom she received the locket?"

"I think she said her father gave it to her, when she was a little child," replied Duke.

"Steel Coat, then, is the man—he must be—whom I must hunt down and kill as I would a dog. When that is done I will turn my back upon the prairie and return to the land of my birth, where many friends await me, not knowing whether I am living or dead."

"You can't go into the Apache kentry," said Big Sam. "I tell you it ain't safe."

"Do I care for that, Sam? Through these many years I have carried my life in my hand, careless when I should be forced to lay it down, and I feel that I shall not die until the man who is most to blame for the death of my wife, is dead at my feet. I will go alone; I need no help."

"Oh no you won't," replied Big Sam. "Look hyar, boys, don't you want to prospect the Apache kentry a little?"

"Bet yer life!" was the unanimous response.

"You see they ar' sot on going, Avoirdupois. We had made up our minds to take a ride among the Apache, and it goes ag'in' the grain to be disapp'nted in our expectations. I fur one, am mighty glad you hev made up yer mind to follow this trail."

"But I do not wish to draw you into danger on my account."

"Oh, bah; don't talk that way, 'cause it sounds awful foolish to me somehow, and I don't know ez I kin stand it. What do you say, Duke; I needn't ask, 'cause you ar' spilin' to git sight of that dreadful pooty gal ag'in."

"I'm with you," replied Duke.

"But, you have business to attend to," persisted the hunter. "I am taking you from it."

"Tain't so; we come out fur a hunt and to kinder look 'round, though we did promise to leave them wagins at Santa Fé, if the cussed reds would let us, which the same they didn't do. I've a notion that we'll strike suthin' rich on the way to the 'Pash kentry, ef we go on."

The hunter talked on until he satisfied the rest as well as himself, that they were doing themselves a personal injus-

ice if they did not follow their friend into the dangerous section he was about to penetrate. Captain Jim especially was wild with joy, for he delighted in scenes of danger, young as he was, and was determined to go with them, although Sam tried to prevail upon him to go back to the fort.

"It won't do," he said, waving off the proposition with a look of disgust. "Not a bit of it, old man. Where you go I go too, and I'll be darned if you can drive me back."

Knowing the stubborn temper of the lad when he had once made up his mind as to what he would do, the hunter said no more and issued his orders to the men to begin at once their preparations for the march. It was proposed to enter the Apache country by a different route from that usually pursued by the Indians, and having gained the mountain passes from which they could have a view of the village over which Steel-Coat was the principal chief, to wait for their chance, which they were sure would come, of making the chief pay the penalty of crimes that had earned him death, long before. With this object in view they marched down the river toward the point where they had the first tussle with the Apache, and then struck off across the plains toward the pass, the position of which was well known to the guides. Half-way across the prairie, they were surprised to meet a solitary white man coming from the Indians. He was a powerful fellow, perhaps forty years of age, with a heavy black beard, which seemed the growth of years, covering his face, dressed in a semi-civilized garb, well mounted, and armed to the teeth. This man reconnoitered the party from a distance, and then rode up just as they were about to camp down for their noonday meal.

"Hi, stranger!" said Big Sam; "whither bound now?"

"Hi, you," was the reply. "I'm separated from my party, boys," and as I've seen Indian sign, I thought you would not object to letting me ride with your party."

"Perhaps we ain't goin' yer way?" replied Big Sam. "We ar' bound west, stranger."

"It don't make any difference to me, men," replied the stranger. "East, west, north or south is the same, so that

I'm with a good party. It isn't safe to be alone out here, as you know, and I am dead beat for some grub."

There is a sort of native hospitality which seems a part of the nature of the prairie-men and will not permit a hungry man to pass them by, if they have any thing to give him, and the stranger was at once invited to alight and make himself at home. He seemed quite ready to do so, and at once picketed his mustang and came into the midst of the group, holding his rifle carelessly in his brown right hand, and looking coolly over the faces of the assembled group, in a way which was rather puzzling to some of them, who did not know how to take him.

"What mou't yer name be, stranger?" said Big Sam.

"What does the name matter out here?" was the reply. "However, as you want to know, I am generally called Joe Forbes."

"Never hern tell of you afore, Joe," said the Kentuckian. "What part of the Indian kentry do you hail from?"

"You can't name any part where I have not struck a buffalo or an Indian," replied Forbes. "Pshaw, boys; it's all right. I am one of your kind, as you will say when you know me well."

"All right, stranger. I am called Kentucky Sam, otherwise Big Sam, pretty well known hyar and hyarabouts. That rooster with the black curly hair is Duke Darrall, a gentleman turned Indian-fighter, and a durned good one he is, too. This little infant on my right is Jim Seaton, better known as Old Avoirdupois, and I'll give you the names of the rest, who are rip snorters, every man, Jack."

He ran over the names of the hunters, pointing them out as he spoke, and winding up with Captain Jim.

"And don't think, stranger, that 'cause I kept the little 'un to the last, he ain't a tearer, 'cause you bet yer life he ain't any thing else. He's got one partic'lar merit, and that is, he kin nose out a man he's once met, no matter what shape he comes in, and put his finger on the spot whar he seen him last."

Joe Forbes started slightly and glanced quickly at the boy, who was looking at him fixedly, his blue eyes taking on a cold, steel-like glitter the longer he gazed.

"Why do you look at me, boy?" demanded Forbes, sternly. "You have never seen me before, have you?"

"Oh yes," replied Captain Jim, quietly. "I saw you at Leavenworth in the spring of '54. You was captain of a mule-train going overland to California, and, if I don't forget, that train got awfully cut up by the Apache."

"I believe you are right about this boy, Kentucky Sam," said Forbes, evidently relieved. "I *was* in Leavenworth that spring, and went out with McCullough's train just when he says I did, and only a few of us got away alive, for we were attacked in a pass and scattered far and wide."

"I told you the boy was a bu'ster," said the old guide. "You can't fool with him, I tell you, fur if he meets you once, he knows you ag'in as sure as eggs is eggs. You'll have to eat pemmican and jerked meat, stranger, because we don't dare to light a fire."

The sacks were brought out, and the men ate heartily, the stranger setting a good example and laughing and joking with his new friends. He sung a capital song, told several side-splitting stories, and made himself a general favorite. Only two in the party seemed to look on him with doubt, and these two were Old Avoirdupois and Captain Jim. As the first was smoking his pipe a little apart from the rest, the boy strolled carelessly to his side, and whispered to him to come away out of ear-shot of the rest.

"What do you think of that Joe Forbes, sir?" asked the boy.

"I don't know what to think. The man impresses me unfavorably, and I should like to see him without his beard, for his air reminds me of one I knew once upon a time, but whom I have not seen for years."

"He never come back to Leavenworth after McCullough's train was cut up," said Jim, "and one or two scouts who got away swore they would shoot him on sight, for if it hadn't been for his foolishness or deviltry, the train would have got through all right."

"We will watch him, my boy," said Old Avoirdupois. "If he is the man you think him to be, the quicker he separates himself from us the better. God forgive me if I do the man wrong, but I don't like his face. We must not be

seen talking too long, for he is looking this way now and seems to be restless."

They strolled back to the camp and began to prepare their horses for the march, and ten minutes after, the party was once more in motion, bearing a little to the south-west, to reach the pass aimed at, which would take them into the Apache country. Joe Forbes, who was handling his rifle carelessly, suddenly discharged it, much to the anger of Kentucky Sam.

"By all the devils out of purgatory!" he roared. "What did ye do that fur?"

"An accident, Sam, an accident. Curse the luck."

"I don't reckon you'd better go any furder with us, ef ye ar' of a keerless dispersition," grumbled Sam. "You'll bring the 'Pash down on us ef ye don't mind."

No more was said, and no sign of the Indians appeared, and the accident was soon forgotten.

They reached the pass about sunset, rode into it half a mile, and camped upon a level piece of ground, hemmed in on every side by the giant mountains. Two men were stationed at the entrance to the pass, one to keep guard while the other slept, so that warning might be given of the slightest approach of danger. Two more went up the pass some distance, with the same purpose, and being thus guarded in front and rear, the rest partook of a hasty supper and lay down to rest, and among the first to snore was Joe Forbes, who was not long alone; for, to the prairie-men, slumber in the open air comes readily. Half an hour later, the loud snoring of Joe Forbes ceased by degrees, and he sat up and looked about him.

Kentucky Sam lay not far away, with his head pillow'd upon his brawny arm, sleeping peacefully. Near him, rolled in a blanket, lay Captain Jim, motionless and silent. Old Avoirdupois had wrapped a blanket around him, pulled a quantity of soft moss for a pillow, and lay somewhat apart from the rest, also sound asleep.

A look of grim satisfaction passed over the face of the stranger, who then began to creep, with cat-like caution and by slow degrees, toward the sleeping form of Seaton. A look at his face was enough to convince any one that his purpose was deadly, and his heavy bowie was in his hand. Inch by

inch he crept on, and raising the gleaming knife on high, aimed it at the place where the left breast of Seaton was visible through the blanket, and struck !

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUBTERRANEAN RIVER.

THE blow descended, but at that moment the destined victim rolled nimbly to one side, and the keen knife buried itself in the soft turf. Before the ruffian could strike again, Captain Jim alighted on his shoulders, for he, too, had been on the watch, and the impetus of his leap carried the assassin to the earth, face downward ; and before he could shake off his diminutive but active antagonist, he was in the strong grasp of Old Avoirdupois, who forced him down upon the turf, with his knee planted upon his upturned shoulders.

"Now, just you keep still, my man," he said, savagely, "or it will be the worse for you. Ha ! what's this ?"

He saw that the black beard was false, and had been slightly displaced. Calling to Big Sam, the struggling man was dragged forward and tightly bound, when Old Avoirdupois grasped the black beard and pulled it from his face. The heavy mustache followed, and yet the face was not improved. Although still handsome, it was the face of a bold, bad man !

"Coward and villain !" cried Old Avoirdupois. "After long years we meet again. Dog, tell me why I should not strike you dead at my feet ?"

"Go to the devil," replied the villain, fiercely. "I have lived a bold life, and I will die a bold death, cursing you and yours with my latest breath."

"Perhaps we may find some punishment worse than death to you," replied Seaton. "My friends will not stain their hands with the blood of such a villain, but they will scourge you like a dog and send you away."

"You'd better let him hand in his checks now, Jim," said

Kentucky Sam. "He ain't the kind of man we like to have as part of the floatin' prary popilation."

"No," replied Seaton, "his crime was against myself, and I demand the right to punish him. Look you, Rodger Bacon, you shall be stripped to the skin, and receive Scripture measure on the bare back. After that, you shall be set free to go where you choose, so that you do not show yourself upon the prairie."

"Hear me, men," screamed Bacon. "Don't let this coward beat me like a dog, but take me out and end all by a rifle-ball. I hate him—have hated him all my life. and he hates me; but, if you are men, don't allow him to disgrace me by a blow."

"You are in the hands of Old Avoirdupois, and he must do what he likes with you," replied Big Sam. "I'm in favor of givin' you a quietus right now; but ef he's ag'in' it, no more need be said."

"Wait," said the villain. "You know me, James Seaton, and that I always keep my word. If you will let me go free, I promise that you shall know all the particulars of the death of your wife. Do you hear me? I can tell you all about it."

Seaton staggered back, a look of horror coming into his face, and his flaming eyes fixed upon the face of the speaker.

"You can tell me—you! Dog, if you had a hand in that horrible butchery, so much as lifting a finger to aid in it, all the wealth of the world will not be enough to purchase your life."

"No, no," replied Bacon, appalled. "I never did it, for you know that I loved her as man never loved a woman before, but I know who was guilty and how it was done."

"Are you lying to me?" hissed the unhappy husband, coming close to him. "Swear by the one thing which I know you hold holy and pure, by your dead mother's grave, that yours was not the hand which did the deed."

"I swear," said Bacon, solemnly. "The man who struck the blow is dead, for I killed him with my own hand."

"If I let you go free, will you promise to name every Indian in that band that I may know them?"

"I will not; not even the prospect of disgrace shall tempt me to betray those who trusted in me."

"You dare to palter with me?" said Seaton, with fearful significance. "I will scourge the life from your body if you do not confess. Strip him, boys."

"The curse of all the devils rest upon your head, if you do it," shrieked Bacon. "Hands off, I tell you, hands off! I am a gentleman and will not endure a blow."

"All right," replied Sam. "If we don't manage to lick some of the gentility out of you, then it won't be my fault. Jim, run up thar and cut some right smart whips, something that will kind o' aggravate his genteel karkidge."

Captain Jim darted away to obey the order, while the prisoner broke out into fierce curses and revilings mingled with threats as to what he would do if they dared to punish him. To this the hunters only replied by jeering laughter, for they began to see that their new friend was not exactly what he represented.

"I ask you once for all, will you tell me what I ask?" demanded Seaton, as the man stood before him, stripped to the waist.

At this moment horses were heard coming up the pass at a gallop; and they were joined by the two men who had been left on guard below.

"Injins!" cried the foremost. "Git, boys, as quick as you can."

"We'll hev to put this thing off, boys," said Big Sam. "Put his clothes on him and hurry up the horses."

While two of the men hurriedly assisted the reprieved villain in replacing his clothing, others brought up the horses, and in less than two minutes the party were on their way up the pass in Indian file, the prisoner in the center. The night was intensely dark, and in the narrow mountain pass the darkness was greater still. Old Avoirdupois rode next in the rear of his prisoner with a pistol in his hand ready to shoot him down if he attempted to escape, which was hardly possible, as his feet were made fast under his horse and his hands bound behind him. In this order they proceeded, and reached a part of the pass where the cliffs upon either side rose to about the bight of a man when standing erect in the saddle. When they reached this place the horse which Seaton rode stumbled, and he dropped his pistol hand to the

rein to check him.' As he did so the prisoner, who had in some way managed to free his hands and feet, suddenly bounded erect in his saddle, and, grasping the edge of the cliff with both hands, he sprung out of the saddle and reached the ledge above.

The pistol cracked and a muttered curse was heard, but they could hear the rush of feet and knew that he was hurrying away in the darkness.

"Halt and chase!" roared Big Sam. "The pizen cuss sha'n't play that game on us, not by a darned sight."

"It is useless," replied Seaton. "I hear the Indians close behind and we can not follow him in the darkness. Ride hard or they will be upon us."

The hunters acknowledged the wisdom of this advice, for the sound of coming hoofs was already heard in the path below and they knew that their enemies were not far away. They rode on as rapidly as possible until they reached a spot where a narrow stream crossed the way, coming out of a cañon of great height upon one side and disappearing upon the other in an immense rocky cavern from which the mist rose like the smoke of a great caldron. Into this stream the hunters plunged, still guided by the Kentuckian, and were quickly lost to view.

Ten minutes after, a great band of Indians came up at full speed and reached the bank of the stream. Among them, looking haggard and pale, with demoniac hatred upon his savage face, rode Rodger Bacon, who had in some way managed to join them. He uttered an oath as he reached the stream, and saw that it was possible for the fugitives to take either the path up the stream, which was shallow, or to go on through the main pass.

"Ten thousand curses," he cried. "Where is Crowing Tom?"

"Hyar I is, Rodger," cried the traitor. "What do you want?"

"Which way do you think they have gone?"

"The natur' of Kentucky Sam is desperit deceitful," replied the man. "He's sech a contrary cuss that ef you take one path he'll be sure to take the other. Don't it seem kind o' foolish to try to foller him in the dark?"

"Get torches," replied Bacon. "I'll have them if it takes my life. Do you know that the devil, Seaton had tied me up and would have lashed me like a dog if you had not come just when you did? Shall I not have my revenge upon him and his tribe?"

"It seems to me you've had a pretty tolerable revenge anyhow, Rodger," replied Tom. "Come, git round, you critters; torches, torches!"

The Indians were not long in finding what they wanted, and havlng arranged the torches, a number of them started forward to look for the trail. But the bottom of the stream and the pass beyond were of solid rock, and left no sign of the passage of the unshod prairie steeds.

"If we lose them now I shall go mad," hissed Bacon. Then, raising his voice, he shouted to the Indians:

"Let the Apache scatter and search for these cowards, who hide like rabbits among the rocks. We will camp here and wait until the scouts bring us good news."

They encamped, sullenly enough, upon the eastern bank of the little stream, while many scouts with torches rode through the passes, searching for any trace of the missing men, who seemed to have disappeared as if by magic. At last, seeing little chance of doing any thing in the darkness, they were recalled, and the whole party went into camp until morning, notwithstanding they feared the hunters would make use of the night to effect their escape. Although the band was the same as that which had been led by Steel-Coat, neither that individual nor Wina were anywhere to be seen, he having left the camp with about twenty warriors to convoy his daughter through the passes to the Apache country, leaving orders with his subordinates what course to pursue.

Rodger Bacon seemed to be well known to the savages, and they looked to him for leadership in the absence of the chief. Crowing Tom was surprised at this, but he knew that the Apache had particular reasons for wishing to conciliate the outlaw, for he was little else.

"Now, whar is that cussed Steel-Coat, Rodger?" said Crowing Tom, after they were encamped. "He ain't no right to be away now."

"He has gone upon an important duty, but will join us to-

night. Don't ask too many questions, my boy; inquisitiveness is a bad thing."

"Yes, I know it is, but there's too much mystery, marchin' and countermarchin', to suit me in this yer campaign. You'll kerry it too fur yit."

"Attend to your business, and let me attend to mine. Let me tell you that if you had not used my name as a passport, your scalp would hang upon a pole at the present time. Be careful what you do and say. Now go and turn in."

"What's the hurry?"

"You go and turn in. That's what you've got to do. Do it at once. I don't generally tell a man any thing unless I mean it."

The traitor arose in a sulky mood, found his blanket and lay down. Half an hour later Bacon left the camp, leading his horse, and passing the guards almost without a challenge. Crowing Tom, although he pretended to be asleep, saw his friend depart with some surprise, and lay awake for two hours waiting for him to return. Sleep at last overcame him, and when he awoke it was morning, and the Indians were moving about preparing for the march and for their frugal morning meal, and to his utter surprise, overseeing all, ordering his subordinates here and there, he saw Steel-Coat, who had come into the camp some time during the night.

"That cuss Bacon and him are together in some deviltry," muttered Crowing Tom. "I reckon I'd better hev staid out of this camp."

But, there was no time for words. If he had any thing to eat before the march commenced, this was the moment for it, as the Indians did not waste many moments over their food. Steel-Coat would not notice him by so much as a word, but waved him off when he approached, and went on with his preparations, and Tom, who knew the moods of the chief well, thought best to leave him. It was a terrible situation, as were already at work, searching here and there for the ace of their enemies who had escaped so strangely, but, as yet, nothing had been found, and Steel-Coat was about to give up the matter, when, chancing to look down into the stream below the pass, he saw a line of horse-tracks upon the slime de-

posited by the stream, leading down toward the place where the river plunged beneath the mountain.

In an instant he was out of the saddle, and running along the verge of the stream, saw with delight that the tracks entered the cavern beneath the hill. His ringing whoop brought up his friends, who started back with horror as he proposed to go down into the dark depths, and told him that the spirits of the rocks and trees would hear his words and avenge them.

"Let them hear, if they will, sons of the Apache!" he cried. "Whether I live or die I follow my enemies under the hills. Who will go with me?"

For a moment the Indians hesitated, for their superstitious minds pictured the place filled with demons of the lower world, but, discipline triumphed, and they plunged with him into the shallow stream, and entered the dark portal through which it flowed.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN.

IT required strong courage—and that Steel-Coat possessed in a high degree—to penetrate that dark and dismal haunt, not knowing but the next step would plunge the leaders into some deep pit far down in the bowels of the earth. But the chief argued that, if his enemies could pass through this strange place, so could he, and almost without dread he pushed his way onward, holding the torch aloft in his right hand, the light of which showed dimly through the mist which arose in blinding con seers about their heads as they proceeded. The wooked to him for leadership in the deep in any place, and theng Tom was surprised at this now six men to advance abreast, whil mar'rof was so high that the rising mist completely shrouded it from view.

A strange, wild and terrible place, where the overhanging rocks seemed to threaten them with instant destruction as they hung above. The sound of the hoofs splashing through

the deep pools awoke strange echoes in that confined space, to which the Indians listened with mingled wonder and fear, for they thought they heard the wail of disembodied spirits, floating above them in the rising mist, but the chief's bold bearing served in a measure to reassure his men, who were trembling in their saddles.

All at once they heard a rushing, burrying sound as of coming wings, and an innumerable body of winged, noisome animals, which had their haunts in this dark place, went sweeping blindly through the ranks of the Indians, and disappeared in the darkness. It required all the control of the chief to restrain the Apaches from turning their horses and making the best of their way out of the dark chamber, but he shouted to them fiercely and those who had actually turned to fly came back at once, such is the power of discipline, and they pursued their way under the hill.

The water did not deepen as they proceeded, and before long they came to a place where the overhanging cliff stooped so low that they were obliged to bend almost to their horses' necks, in order to avoid the rocks above. While yet crowded into this narrow space, the mountain seemed to fall crashing about their ears, so terrible was the tumult as the rifles of the rangers lying in wait began to play upon the advancing foe, striking them down on every side.

No person can describe the awful confusion into which the Apaches were thrown by the sudden and fearful attack. Coming as it did like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, it would have been appalling to any class of men, but the Indians were crowded into a confined space from which they could neither advance or retreat on account of their companions, who unthinking of danger, crowded in from the rear, forcing them forward in spite of themselves toward the spot where the cavern was lighted up by the continued blaze of the deadly rifles. It was a terrible situation, and one which might have appalled the stoutest heart, for their enemies were only visible by the flash of their rifles and the Apaches were but poorly provided with fire-arms. Yet, while the iron hail swept through their ranks, hurling man after man into the sluggish tide, where, whether dead or wounded, they perished miserably, twenty of the bravest men

detached themselves from the struggling group, and rushed on to the attack. But, when they neared the place from which the terrible fire proceeded, they found their assailants perched upon ledges high above them, from which they could pour their fire unmolested upon the foe. The Indians recoiled and the voice of Steel-Coat rung through the cavern, ordering a retreat, for he was not the man to risk a loss to no purpose. The Apaches were not sorry to avail themselves of the opportunity, and in ten minutes only the distant sound of flying feet told that they were retreating from the battle under the earth.

"Sich is life," roared Big Sam, shewing himself upon a ledge. "Git, you condemned critters—git! Come out of yer holes, boys, 'cause we've smote the Philistines, hip and thigh, and they ain't coming back fur no more; they don't hanker arter it."

As he spoke, the hunters began to descend from the ledges where they had taken shelter, silent and grim, taking the matter as coolly as most old hunters do, and regarding the whole affair as pleasant pastime.

"Does anybody know whether them cussed critters carried off the chief safe?" asked Sam. "I thought I marked him."

"I heard him order them to retreat," replied Duke. "I don't believe the rascal is hurt at all."

"His time is not yet," said Old Avoirdupois, solemnly. "Something tells me that he will not die except by my hand."

The riflemen paced slowly through the stream, taking the direction in which the current flowed; Captain Jim, full of life, dilating upon the ludicrous side of the fray; Big Sam calm as a summer morning, and seeming to regard the whole affair as one of the common incidents of everyday life. Duke Darrall, who had mingled more with life in the east, looked serious, and Old Avoirdupois cool, calm, self-reliant, appeared to regard it as a part of his mission. Twenty minutes walk brought them to their horses, which were standing in a group in the water, under the charge of a single man, who was sulky at not being permitted to take a share in the fray.

"You want all the fun yourself, *you* do, Kentucky," he growled, as the party mounted. "Now you've kept me out

of the nicest little fight I ever see, holdin' hosses like a boy. 'Tain't right, 'tain't proper, and I don't like it."

"Oh, shet up, Bill, and don't growl so much," replied the guide. "Next time we hev a scrimmage you shill be in the fight, and ef it's necessary I'll hold the hosses myself."

The party proceeded for half a mile until they reached a rocky cleft, which led upward at an angle of thirty degrees, barely wide enough for a single horseman to pass through. Up this the horses were led for some distance, when the path again slanted downward, and they began to see a dim light not far ahead, and after a time came out of the strange road into a grove of thick trees, which completely hid the entrance to the place from view.

"How did you come to know that place, Sam?" said Old Avoirdupois, astonished at the result of their tramp.

"It's too long a story to tell you now," replied the old hunter. "Why, Lord love you, thar's a yarn hangs onto that cave that I couldn't begin to tell in two days, but some of these times, when I cain't do no better, I'll tell ye about it."

"But where does the stream come out, Sam?"

"That I don't know. I've traveled down-stream near a mile, but ther' didn't seem to be no eend of it, and we didn't keer to go no furder. It's a funny place, I tell you."

"It may serve us yet before we are done with this affair," said Avoirdupois. "Where does this pass lead to?"

"We kin git to the Apache country by it, and that's enuff fur you," replied Sam. "Come along."

They led their horses out of the tangled thicket, and found themselves in a rock-strewn cañon, which at one time had been the bed of a mountain stream, but which was now thickly strewn with fragments of rock, patches of sage-bush and other mountain shrubs growing up between. Through this pass the party proceeded at a rapid pace, and were quickly lost to view amid the overhanging cliffs. As they turned an angle of the rocks, a slight sound, which might have passed unnoticed by most men, came to the ears of Big Sam, and immediately after, a small stone rolled slowly down the side of the cliff.

"Don't look up," whispered the Kentuckian, "fur I purpose to gobble that owdashus cuss immedjiate. Steel-Coat

don't mean to let us hev a clear road to the Apash kentry ef he kin help it. Keep right on, and don't seem to mind it ef my hoss runs away with me. Whoa! you contumacious skunk! whoa! Durn you, keep still! Whoa, I say! whoa!"

He seemed to struggle desperately with his plunging horse, at the same time slyly using his spur, and the mustang, amazed at such treatment, stretched away at a pace which carried him quickly along the pass. A moment after the white party had passed, a dusky face peered over the cliff intently following the party with his eye.

"Ugh!" he muttered. "Good; white man fool; thinks to blind Steel-Coat."

The devil in the nature of the savage was struggling in his breast, prompting him to make trial of the weapons he bore upon the hated white men. Upon second thought he changed his purpose, and stole along the edge of the cliff with a noiseless step, following them on their course, determined to see what their purpose was before he permitted them to depart, and if possible see them encamped before he returned to Steel-Coat with his report. His black eyes sparkled as he pursued his way, taking advantage of every short cut to get ahead of them, but it was some time before he was able to do so. When he succeeded, to his surprise he found that Kentucky Sam was not with the party, and that Captain Jim was leading his horse by means of a lariat.

"Good," muttered the savage. "Big hunter fall down—break his neck—all too good!"

"Yer mighty right, Injun," said the voice of the hunter, behind him. "It's too durned good to be true."

The Indian started to his feet and saw before him the terrible figure of the hunter.

The Apache was no coward, and with a yell of rage, he sprung like a cat at the throat of the hunter, and they instantly grappled, striving for the mastery. The Indian was a stalwart fellow, and Big Sam found that he had almost his match. They trampled up and down the plateau, upon which the battle was fought, while Sam forced his enemy back until he brought him almost to his knees. The Indian saw that he had but one chance, and, wrenching his hands free, he

caught the hunter by the ankles, and rising with him, in spite of the terrible blow which he received from the hatchet of the hunter, he was able to overthrow the scout, and bring him down with stunning force upon the rocks.

The savage was desperately wounded, and while his enemy lay senseless under the force of the blow, he staggered back and sunk upon his knee, with the blood streaming down his face, and his brain in such confusion that, for the moment, he could not complete the work he had begun. But the sight of his enemy lying there recalled his scattered senses, and he began to creep on his hands and knees toward his knife, which he had dropped in the struggle.

As he did so, he became conscious that some one was rapidly climbing the cliff toward them, and had nearly reached the top. A moment more and the head of Old Avordupois appeared above the verge of the cliff, and the Indian saw that he had only time for vengeance before he died, for he was not strong enough either to fight or fly. With a snarl like that of a tiger, he snatched up the knife and staggered to his feet. As he did so, Old Avordupois leveled a pistol at him, and pulled the trigger ; but no report followed. He tried the other barrel, but with like effect.

"Ha, white dog !" shrieked the Apache, shaking his knife in the air. " You come too late, for the big hunter lies under my knife."

"Don't strike, Indian, and you shall go free," cried Seaton, in the Indian tongue.

"No," replied the Apache ; "Bare Arm must die, but he will first kill the white dog who has given him the death-blow."

He was about to turn and complete his work, when the hand of Old Avordupois was thrown backward, and a beam of light passed from his hand to the bosom of the Apache. It was his bowie, thrown with the unerring skill only known among bordermen and Indians. Turning twice in the air, the keen point entered the left breast of the savage just above the collar-bone, with a direction down among the vitals. The savage uttered an appalling shriek, and throwing up his arms, plunged head-foremost into the gulch below. Old Avordupois dragged himself up to the platform, where he found Big

Sam sitting up, and rubbing the back of his head in a reflective manner.

"Well, I'm durned—well, I'm blow'd! Ef this don't beat all! Old Kaintuck beat by a red—yes, by mortal! Beat by a durned red, yes! Say, old Jim, take me out and plant me, fur I ain't no good no more!"

"You are worth a dozen dead men yet, Sam," said Seaton, assisting him to rise. "That's it; how do you feel?"

"Kinder dizzy, I reckon. Got a drop of the real stuff handy?"

Old Avoirdupois produced a flask, and Big Sam took a "long pull." "Richard was himself again," and they went down the cliff together, Big Sam grumbling all the way at the impudence of the "cussed red" who had dared to throw him in open battle. It was not until he had heard the story from Captain Jim, that he fully realized how near he had been to death, and he mounted his horse with a look of deep shame upon his face.

"Seven Injins—seven!" he muttered. "I'll have to rub out that many afore I consider myself a man ag'in. Forward, you, git!" and the party passed on their way.

CHAPTER XI.

WINA AT HOME — THE SETON GIRL.

NESTLED amid the giant mountains, in a beautiful valley which seemed too fair to be the scene of strife and bloodshed, was the Indian village over which Steel-Coat ruled. The strangely shaped ledges with the blue smoke rising about them, the figures of the men and women passing to and fro, the old men basking in the sun and smoking their long-stemmed pipes, the horses grazing upon the plains—all combined to make an interesting picture.

Suddenly the village was in commotion, and in the twinkling of an eye all who were old enough to carry a weapon were ready for battle. The men sprung into their saddles

and rode out toward the mountains, brandishing their spears and uttering shrieks of defiance. Myriads of dogs, which seem to form the most numerous part of the population of an Indian village, went howling about the place. The old men collected the women near the horses, prepared to fight or fly as circumstances might require, for they did not know but that their ancient enemies might have discovered the absence of their fighting-men and had taken advantage of the fact to make an attack upon the village. Their doubts were soon set at rest, for the defiant yells of the warriors changed to cries of delight, and they rode out at full speed to meet a long line of warriors who were descending the mountain pass. Cries eulogizing the name of Steel-Coat announced that it was that redoubted warrior who was approaching his village, and the whole population poured out to meet them on foot and horseback as was most convenient, while groups of children added their shrill pipe to the chorus of welcome. But, as the party came nearer they showed none of those spoils of war which they were wont to bring back upon their return from the prairie, and marched sullenly into the village with Steel-Coat at their head. As the inhabitants surrounded them the chief paused and raised his hand for silence.

"Children of the Apache nation," he cried, "let none welcome us with joy to the village, for a cloud has come between us and the face of the Great Spirit. We have been a whole moon upon the war-path, and have but three sclaps to show you, and many will come no more to the village. Let the children of the Apache mourn."

A dead silence fell upon the multitude, which lasted for some moments, as their eyes roved over the ranks of the warriors to see who were missing. As soon as they had satisfied themselves, a wail, a sad, tremulous sound—passed from lip to lip. There is nothing more mournful upon earth than the wail of sorrow which the Indian raises over his slain friends. Each family recognized its loss, and the children who had lost fathers spoke their names in the tender tones of affection.

"Alas for the warriors!" was the cry. "Weep for Bare-Arm, who went out only to victory. Weep for Ishpahan, for Great Bear and Obbole, for they have fallen. Alas, the warriors, they are dead!"

Leaving the village to mourn the fallen, the great chief rode at once to his lodge, where he found Wina in waiting. She arose and looked at him in an eager, questioning way, which he started back in anger.

"Wina is glad when the braves come back empty-handed from the war-path," he hissed, "because she does not love her people. This must end, and a child of Steel-Coat must learn to love the things which her father loves and hate that which he hates."

"Wina does not love to see the blood of brave men flow," said the girl, softly, "whether of Indians or white men."

"Hearken!" cried her father, fiercely. "I am not blind, and have seen how you looked at the white hunter called Darrall, who is one of the chief of the men who have robbed me of my bravest warriors. I will put an end to it, for you shall be the wife of an Apache chief and learn to love your people."

The girl started back with a look of horror as the chief calmly laid aside the shining coat which he wore, and revealed, beneath, the common calico hunting-shirt worn by the warriors of the tribe. His face hands and arms were so covered with fantastic painting that it was impossible to say how his features would appear without the paint, but his eyes glowed fiercely under his shaggy brows.

"I will die first!" cried Wina. "Beware what you do, my father, for Wina will never be a wife to an Indian!"

The warrior grasped his knife and seemed about to strike her down, but at last released her with a violence that made her stagger, while by a haughty gesture he commanded her to leave the lodge.

She met, in passing, a young chief of the tribe whose village lay to the north, but who often joined his forces with those of her father when they went out upon the plains on hunting or war-excursions. She had seen, before, that the young warrior, who was a rising man in his nation, loved her, and would have been happy to take her into his lodge, but she had given him no encouragement; and her father, until now, had seemed willing that she should devote herself to a life of celibacy, as she could not love any of the young men of the tribe. But, his anger being aroused, she could not say to

what lengths he might go in endeavoring to force her to unite her fortunes with an Indian brave.

"Wina, the moon of the Apache, has not shed her light upon the heart of Long Spear for many days," said the young brave, laying his hand upon his bosom. "Now she has come again, the heart of the young chief is glad."

She pushed by him almost rudely, and hurried out of the village upon the plain, refusing the company of some of the Indian girls, who would have gone with her. Long Spear looked after her angrily for a moment, and then, lifting the lodge-curtain, entered the lodge, where he faced Steel-Coat with a moody look.

"The daughter of the chief forgets who Long Spear is," said the young chief, haughtily, "when she refuses to listen to his words."

"The girl is a fool," said Steel-Coat, laconically. "Does Long Spear look for wisdom as well as beauty in a woman? If so, he will be disappointed."

The young chief bowed, as if in recognition of the truth of the saying. Nothing is so prominent in the character of the American Indian as his supreme contempt for the mental qualities of woman, and Long Spear was ready to accept the dogma.

"See!" said Steel-Coat. "I have said that Wina shall be the wife of Long Spear. Let him go away and come back with the next sun, and he shall know when she will be ready to go into his lodge."

The countenance of the young man, which before had been dark and forbidding, cleared up at once. Such a thing as the possibility of the girl daring to oppose her father's will never entered his brain, and he regarded the matter as settled and left the lodge at once, full of elation. Steel-Coat remained pacing up and down in deep thought for a time, when he went to a corner of the lodge, and throwing aside some blankets and furs, found a small chest. This he opened, and remained for some time turning over its contents, which were of a kind not usually found in an Indian lodge, being toilet articles, such as ladies use, small mirrors, and the like.

From the bottom of the chest he took out a bundle of letters, which he looked over intently, and what was still more

strange, seemed to read. It had been reported upon the plains that Steel-Coat had this accomplishment, and many were the theories which were started concerning him, about the hunters' fire.

His countenance changed as he read them, one by one, and at last he started up in a passion, hurled the articles into the box again, and sprung to his feet, going out into the open space in front of the lodge.

The funeral rites of those who had been slain had already commenced, and he joined in the strange and imposing ceremonies. It is needless to relate the solemn rites with which an Indian is laid in his grave, or to dilate upon the beautiful ideas which these simple people have of a future state. Enough to say that it is at once impressive and grand. Many dark glances were cast at the traitor, Crowing Tom, who stood looking on, and murmurs began to pass amid the crowd, asking why this white man was free and in their midst. Just as Steel-Coat came out of the lodge, a rush was made at the white man, and he was seen struggling in the midst of a multitude of dark and distorted faces, while a hundred weapons were raised against his defenseless breast. In an agony of terror, he shrieked for help, and Steel-Coat burst into the crowd, scattering it right and left, until he reached the side of his white friend.

"Back, children of the Apache!" he cried. "Back! Would you make your chief a dog and a liar? I have promised that this man shall be safe, and I will keep my word."

They fell back at the word, and so great was their reverence for him that every weapon was dropped, while he drew Crowing Tom protectingly to his side.

"Look, my children," cried the chief; "all this blood shall not be shed in vain, for soon the Apache will be upon the war-path, and we will take a terrible revenge for the braves who have fallen. Shall it be so, my warriors?"

A shout went up to the sky, and from that moment Crowing Tom was safe from them. As they stood looking at their chief, Wina was seen approaching, leading by the hand a girl in the costume of the Burnt Wood Tetons. She was a slight creature, with a comely face, in a dainty Indian dress, bearing upon her person the marks of a long journey.

"Who is this?" cried the chief. "Wina has brought us a child of our enemies."

"She seeks shelter under the wings of the Apache eagle," was the reply of his daughter. "For many days she has wandered since she was lost upon the prairie by her friends, and has come to the Apache village for shelter."

The strange girl stood in an easy, careless attitude, with her hands crossed before her, waiting for the decision of the chief.

"No one, not even a warrior of the enemy, shall ask in vain for food and drink. Let the Teton maiden enter the lodge with Wina, and receive food and drink."

Wina again took the hand of the stranger maiden, and led her into the lodge, where she had food prepared, and sat down to eat. She showed a not very girlish appetite, and looked up in a strange way at her entertainer, from time to time. Wina understood only a few words of the Teton dialect, and their conversation was confined to monosyllables, in question and answer. While she was yet satisfying her hunger, the lodge-curtain was lifted and Steel-Coat came in. His knowledge of the Teton dialect was also defective, and he got on but poorly in questioning the girl, and finally left her with Wina. The moment he was gone, the strange girl ran to the curtain and peeped out, satisfying herself that no one was listening, and then came back to the side of Wina with a hurried step.

"Take care now, Wina," she whispered. "Don't you know me, then? I am Captain Jim, the boy you saw at the hunters' camp."

It was indeed the reckless boy, who, in this disguise, had dared to penetrate into the Indian village. Wina looked at him in mute surprise, for she knew the terrible danger in which he stood if detected.

"Don't look so scared for my sake," whispered the boy. "Don't be afraid for me, as I am in no danger unless you betray me."

"I betray you? Never!"

"I didn't think you would," said the boy. "Now, I'm sent here by Old Avoirdupois—that's a name we give Jim Seaton—to find out all about you and your father."

"I will not join in any plot against him," she said, firmly.

"We don't believe that he is your father, anyhow. Now, see here: if you stay here he will make you marry some sneaking red, and you'd a durned sight better marry me, or better yet, you might marry Duke Darrall. That young 'un is just desperate about you."

Wina shook her head, while a bright, rosy tint stole up into her brown cheek.

"Where are the white men? Have they dared to come into the Apache country?" she said, hurriedly. "Go back to them and tell them that they must fly, for the anger of Steel-Coat is terrible when aroused."

"We don't scare pretty easy, you know," said the disguised boy, quietly. "Now, let me ask you, did you ever think far enough ahead to try to find out where your white blood came from?"

"White blood; I am an Indian!"

"Pshaw! tell that to the marines. I know that you think you are an Injun, but, good gracious! any one with half an eye can see that it's precious little Injun blood you've got in *your* veins. Now, when you see your father next, ask him in plain words who your mother was, and if she was an Injun. Here he comes."

Captain Jim turned aside, and sat down upon a pile of furs in one corner, while the chief was moving about the lodge, putting aside the various articles of warlike gear which he had removed.

"Let the daughter of the Tetons go out of the lodge," said Steel-Coat, "and wait outside until she is called."

The disguised boy arose and went out into the open air, and stood leaning against one of the stakes of the lodge, where he became the object of respectful admiration on the part of various Apache braves, whose unqualified approval tickled the boy mightily.

"I've got to look out for myself, or some of these fellows will want to marry me," he thought. "Highly flattered, of course, but it won't do."

Steel-Coat and Wina were left together, and he beckoned her to come closer. "You have seen the young chief, the Long Spear," he said. "I have promised that you shall go

into his lodge. When will you be ready to obey me, Wina?"

"Never!" she replied. "Long Spear is a fool, and Wina will never marry an Indian."

"Ha! tell me why?"

"Because Indian and white blood can never mingle. Wina is not an Indian."

The chief started to his feet with an exclamation which sounded very like an oath, and stared at her in confusion and surprise. But he controlled himself in a moment.

"Who has been speaking lies in the ears of Wina?" he said.

"No one has spoken lies but the truth. Wina is not an Indian, and Steel-Coat has deceived his daughter all these years. Tell me, and speak the truth, was not my mother of the blood of the white men?"

The chief set his teeth so firmly together that a grating sound was distinctly audible. His hands opened and closed convulsively as if he were tempted to tear her limb from limb.

"The white dog, Seaton, has been at work here," he hissed. "Know then, Wina, that your mother was a white woman, but my curse upon the head of the man who betrayed me! See; you have tempted me too far and now you have hastened your fate. When the sun shall rise to-morrow, you shall be the wife of Long Spear."

She fell upon her knees before him and held up her hands pleadingly. "No, no, my father. Let me live free from this stain, for the sake of my mother. I can not love an Indian; I can not go into his lodge."

"Beware; my anger is hot against you, and if you do not cease your pleading I will strike you down."

She rose with folded arms and faced him, but a glance at her resolute face told him that he had gone too far, and that she would resist him even to the death. Without a word, he turned and left the lodge, and a moment after the disguised boy came in.

"I will save you," he whispered. "Trust in me for that."

CHAPTER XII.

HEMMED IN.

THE morning had scarcely come when the young chief Long Spear, impatient for the decision of Wina, came to the Apache village, accompanied by a choice retinue of his own men, blazing in barbaric ornament, to witness the betrothal ceremonies between their chief and the fair girl. The princess had not appeared, nor had she been seen since the night before, and her father waited impatiently for her appearance, trusting that a night of thought might have made her more willing to obey his commands. The sun was up and shining brightly and yet she did not appear, and Long Spear began to show signs of anger. Seeing this, Steel-Coat called an Indian girl, a favorite and friend of his daughter, and ordered her to go into Wina's lodge, which was built up close to that of the chief, and tell her to come forth. The girl lifted the curtain and disappeared, but she came out immediately, with a look of surprise upon her face.

"Wina is not in the lodge," she said.

Steel-Coat pushed her rudely aside and darted into the lodge. A glance at the couch of skins upon which Wina usually reclined revealed the fact that it had not been occupied, and the little rifle she generally carried had disappeared, neither was the disguised boy anywhere to be seen.

"Look," said Long Spear, lifting a piece of paper which lay upon the ground. "Talking paper."

Steel-Coat snatched it from his hand with a fierce cry, and from the way in which he looked at it the looker-on could have seen that he could read. An expression of demoniac rage passed over his face as he rent the paper into fragments.

"Let Steel-Coat tell his friend who put the words upon the talking paper?" said Long Spear.

"A spy!" replied Steel-Coat, gnashing his teeth. "That Teton girl was all a lie, for it was the white boy who

came to the camp on the great river and took away the prisoner. Pick out a strong band of the bravest warriors and let them mount and be ready, and Steel-Coat will be with them soon."

"Has Wina fled from the village?" demanded Long Spear.

"Yes, yes; why waste so many words? She has fled to one she loves, the white man Darrall."

"Ha!" hissed the young chief. "An Apache chief will take his scalp."

He hurried away to pick out the men, while Steel-Coat darted into his own lodge to put on his armor. As he entered, he saw that the pile of skins was in confusion, and that two or three pieces of paper were scattered about, and with an agonized cry he darted to the place, threw off the skins and opened the box. At a glance he saw that the packet of letters and papers which he had examined the night before was gone.

"Robbed!" he screamed. "If Seaton should get them, all my labor would be in vain and my revenge foiled. Death to him and all his crew, but the torture for that thrice accursed boy."

He caught up the coat from which he derived his *sobriquet* and put it on hastily, buckled his belt about him, took a pair of pistols, a knife and a hatchet from the hooks upon which they hung, and darted from the lodge. A boy had brought up his horse and was holding it at the door, and the gallant band of warriors who had been arrayed by Long Spear greeted him with a shout, which he returned with a haughty gesture of his hand.

"Send out scouts to look for the trail," he said. "Naked Wolf, Prairie Dog and Black Kettle must go."

The three warriors designated by these euphonious names, darted out at once and made a rapid circuit of the village, looking closely at the earth. Directly after Naked Wolf paused and held up his hand, uttering a shout to draw their attention, and the two chiefs rode swiftly down toward him. The impression he had found was hardly discernible upon the grass, yet the chiefs nodded approvingly.

"They have taken horses," said Steel-Coat. "Go to the horse guards and see if any are missing."

Naked Wolf hurried away and came back in a moment to say that two horses had been stolen, and that they were the best in the drove. He had found the place where they had mounted and the trail was plain. Calling to the picked men to follow slowly, the two chiefs rode down to the place, while Naked Wolf ran beside them and showed them the starting point of the fugitives.

"It is good, Naked Wolf," said Steel-Coat. "Get your horse and go in front."

The red trailer ran back and immediately after appeared well mounted, and took the advance, bending forward a little in order to keep his eye upon the trail, but so keen was his sight that he rode at a smart pace, while the rest followed at the same rate of speed. The trail led as they expected toward the mountain, and the chief pressed the pursuit with ardor, seconded by Long Spear, who was rendered half-mad by the loss of his intended bride.

"We will light a great fire when this young dog has been taken," he said. "He can not escape us. See, he has gone into the pass, and there is but one way out of it. Let us send 'en warriors on foot across the mountain, to guard the other end of the pass."

"My young friend is a great brave and will be a wise chief," said Steel-Coat. "Send them."

There was a footpath across the mountain which would take footmen to the other end of the pass in one-half the time it would take to ride through it. This footpath was well known to the warriors, and taking their weapons they sprung down and hurried up the mountain-side, where they were quickly lost to view. The rest followed the trail into the pass, which was the one into which the hunters had come after the fight under the earth. Satisfied that the two fugitives would not leave their horses, the Indians rode swiftly through the pass, and after an hour's ride the foremost horseman recoiled, for there amid the rocks with which the pass was strewn lay the mangled form of the gigantic warrior who had so nearly finished Big Sam. A furious yell burst from every throat, for the dead man was a favorite with the party, and until now, although they knew that he was missing, they did not know that he had fallen. While they

grouped together above the body of the fallen man, those who had been sent through the pass hurried up and reported that they had come through the entire length of the pass and that no sign of the fugitives could be seen until they reached the thicket from which the trail seemed to come.

"Cover the body of Bare Arm with stones so that the wolves can not tear it and come with me," said Steel-Coat. "The white hunters are with them now and my daughter has turned traitor to the people who took her when a little child and gave her bread. She is no longer my child."

"Wina has been asleep," said Long Spear, who, as well as was possible in one of his savage nature, loved the beautiful girl. "When she wakes up again, she will know that the Apache love her, and be the wife of Long Spear. But, she will not awake until the white man Darrall is dead."

"Forward," cried Steel-Coat, who saw that the body of the dead brave had already been covered by stones thrown loosely upon it. "They shall die like dogs."

They reached the thicket into which the trail seemed to lead, and were about to dismount when the crack of rifles announced the presence of the hunters. The shouts of Big Sam, the victorious cheer of Duke Darrall, and the shrill pipe of Captain Jim announced at once who were their opponents. The leading warriors bounded from the saddle, but four or five would never mount again, and a simultaneous rush was made at the thicket, where they were warmly received and beaten back at the point of the knife and the edge of the hatchet. The hunters fought covered by the bushes, and their revolvers told with deadly effect upon the rapidly thinning ranks of the Indians. Yet, numbers must tell, and as he saw the enemy gathering in a compact body for a rush, Big Sam whispered to his men:

"Fall back, boys; git into the pass now, and the devil himself can't drive us out. One man kin hold a thousand."

The Indians made their grand rush, but they found no opponent, and reached the mouth of the pass in safety. One mad warrior rushed in with poised hatchet, but he never came out. A dull blow was heard, and all was still. A second shared the same fate, and the rest paused in dismay, for it was death to enter the pass, which, as we have said, was barely

wide enough to admit the passage of a man or horse, and certainly not two abreast. Within this pass, at the first turn, the rocks jutted out so as to form a shelter for Duke Darrall and Big Sam, who stood with their hatchets poised, ready to strike down the first man who appeared. Two had already fallen and the rest hesitated.

"Cowards," shrieked Steel-Coat, "must I always lead you?"

He grasped his hatchet and ran in, closely followed by Long Spear. Old Avoirdupois, hearing *him* coming, sprung forward and dealt him such a blow that nothing saved him except the remarkable armor which he wore. As it was he staggered back, grasped madly at the air, and fell, but his men dragged him out before a hand could be put out to grasp him and finish the work. Long Spear was not so fortunate. In the confusion of the moment he managed to pass the two stern guards, and wheeling gave utterance to his terrific war-cry and raised his knife against Big Sam, who coolly put aside the blow, and buried his own blade in the bosom of the doomed warrior.

"Two," cried the hunter as he shook the blood from the blade and tore off the scalp. "I'll git even if this yer keeps on. Stand stiddy, Duke; why darn my cats ef we kain't keep this place a thousand years. Bet yer life on it; oh, yes we kin."

All was silent, and the presence of the Indians could only be told by an occasional muttering.

"Tell the gal to keep back out of sight, and if the whole 'Pash nation was to come, we'd clean 'em out. I ain't hed so much fun sense old Sully give 'em particular Jesse out hyar on the prahary. You bet!" roared Big Sam.

Still the Indians did not advance, and the scout began to be impatient.

"Why don't you come, you cowards? Oh, *why, now, you!* Come up and be men, do. It's real sneaking, you know. I wouldn't sneak; come, let's hear from you. Whar's Crowing Tom, the owdashus onprincipulled heathen? Let him sing out so that I kin hear him."

But Crowing Tom had no desire to sing out, and directly after Sam peeped out from the cover and saw that the In-

dians were piling huge stones in the entrance of the cavern in such a way as to block it completely up.

"Now look at that, boys," he cried in a tone of complete disgust. "Don't it seem awful to you to see a lot of low-lived, pizen red niggers shutting white men up that way? Git back ez quick ez ye kin and make fur the mouth of the cave. I'll foller ez soon ez I'm sure they ain't goin' to come this way."

Duke Darrall sprung back, and a few rods down the cleft he found the entire party waiting, and among the rest, Wina, who, sooner than obey her father in marrying the young chief, had fled with Captain Jim. The boy had done his work well, and had managed to steal the horses, get out of the village, and rejoin his friends before they could be overtaken by the Apaches.

"They are blocking up the pass with stones," he cried. "We must get out of this as quickly as we can. Give me your hand, Wina; the path is rough."

"Wina can walk," replied the girl, blushing vividly, and turning away her graceful head.

But he would not listen to her, and taking her hand in his, he led her forward until they reached the place where the cleft entered the great cavern. Here the horses were brought forward and the party mounted, and waited a moment for Big Sam, who joined them on the run, and they hurried the pace, Duke leading Wina's horse and ready to aid her should any accident occur. The rest clattered along behind them, full of merry life as these strange men are under almost any circumstances, laughing and skylarking with each other. Big Sam, as knowing the way best, took the advance, and led them as rapidly as was possible in the darkness, which was of course intense, now that they had got into the main cave.

"I reckon we kin git thar ahead of the cusses," said the guide looking back at Duke, unless they know some pass I don't. I reckon—ha! Git back, boys, as ef the devil kicked you. Hyar they ar', by mortal snakes."

It was too true. While a portion of the savage band were engaged in blocking up the entrance through which they could not pass, the rest had crossed the mountain by a path known only to them and were now entering the cave,

wading in the shallow water, some bearing torches, the light of which, falling upon the points of limestone overhead, made them glitter like stars. It was this which had attracted the attention of Big Sam and warned him that the enemy was in front.

"Fall back as quick as you can," whispered Old Avoirdupois. "I am very much afraid that we are trapped. But back, and hope for the best."

They hurried over the road which they had lately passed over, and breathed more freely when they had reached and passed the entrance to the cliff. From this point the water began to shoal again, and after proceeding far enough to be out of the reach of the torches, they halted, in the hope that all the savages would march up the cleft and allow them to slip by. But, Steel-Coat was too acute for that, and only a few of his men were permitted to pass into the cleft, while the rest remained behind waiting for the report.

"Git back farder," said Big Sam. "The pizen riporate is bound to have us. He's jest the meanest red nigger—the meanest! Come along, but step mighty keerful."

They began to feel their way carefully along the pass, hoping against hope that another opening might be found which would take them into the open air. In this moment of peril, the brave heart of Old Avoirdupois showed its true worth. He was the one to ride by the side of the shrinking girl, to encourage her, to promise to be a father to her if they safely reached the settlement. Her father appalled her now, for she saw that he was a bloodthirsty and cruel man, to whom human suffering was but sport, and that he would trample upon her heart if she stood in the way of his designs. In the white men, she saw a different spirit. They sought no combat nor refused it, when offered, and were gentle and chivalrous to her, a weak girl, and eager to aid her.

"Give me a pistol," she whispered to Old Avoirdupois. "I can use it."

"Durn my hide ef I don't think she would, and right smart too," said Big Sam, admiringly. "Ef we do hev to turn on the pizen snakes, let's take keer the gal don't beat us, that's all."

They had reached the end of their journey. The waters of

the stream plunged under the base of a gigantic rock and was seen no more, and the vaulted passage came to an end.

"Played out," cried Big Sam. "Back to the narrow place, out pistols and knives and die hard."

The crisis had come.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EARTHQUAKE. A HAPPY END.

THERE was no time to be lost. They could hear the stones come crashing down as the Indians who had blocked up the narrow pass comprehended that they had nothing to do but throw down their barricade, and rush in, as they thought to place their desperate enemies between two fires. Their peans of victory changed to yells of rage as they met in the midst of the narrow place, where the bleeding forms of their slain comrades lay, and found that the hunters had already decamped, and they rushed back into the main cavern, where the stern command of Steel-Coat brought them to order. He knew that the whites had not passed out, and as far as they could go into the depths of the earth it was possible for him to pursue. The savages were well supplied with torches, while the whites had none. This, so far from being an advantage, would be of use to the riflemen in showing them where to aim, but this was more than counterbalanced by the aid which the lights would give them in making the advance.

The place which Big Sam had selected as their fortress was not so good as the one in the narrow pass, for here four men could rush on abreast, and numbers would eventually carry the day. Besides, they must fight up to their knees in water, and the damps of the place rendered their rifles less effective than they would be under ordinary circumstances. But, they took their stations like men who were about to die, but would die bravely.

"Keep that gal away, Old Avoirdupois," cried Big Sam. "I'll never forgive ye ef she gets hurt."

"Let me fight," pleaded Wina. "I have my rifle."

"She ain't no coward, boys," said Sam, admiringly turning to his friends. "Who is so mean and sneaking among ye that he kain't fight fur a gal like that? Ha! thar's a torch; take yer places, boys, and keep quiet."

A single figure, holding a torch aloft, came round an angle of the rocks and looked down the stream. The light of the blazing flambeau fell upon his upturned face, and they saw that it was their former friend, Crowing Tom, who had joined with their enemies to hunt them down. A smile of fierce and savage meaning crossed the hard face of Big Sam, as his rifle came slowly to his shoulder, and the traitor stood like a statue, looking downward. A moment of dead silence, and then the never-failing rifle spoke, and, stricken down as suddenly as by a thunderbolt, the traitor bounded upright, shot through the brain, and fell upon his face in the water, the torch expiring with a sharp hiss.

"Rubbed out!" hissed Big Sam. "He won't turn traitor no more, that critter won't. Look out, boys, they are coming."

"Back, Wina," cried the young hunter, Darrall. "You are in danger here."

"I will remain by your side," she answered, "and if you die, I will die with you."

"No, no, Wina," he murmured. "I love you too well to think calmly of your death. Keep back, for you will make me a fool and coward if you remain in sight."

She moved back to an angle of the rock, and had her little rifle poised, ready for work, if it should be necessary.

The death of the white traitor had warned the Indians of the whereabouts of their enemies, and with startling yells, they came on to the attack, their weapons poised, and their savage faces looking more unearthly under the light of the flambeaus.

Three times, eight deadly rifles spoke, and three times the head of the advancing Indian party faded away before the withering fire. But they were now mad with rage, and hardly knew that their friends had fallen, and with terrible cries flung themselves upon the firm front of the hunters in the guarded pass.

The pages of history teem with adventure, of noble daring,

of gallant exploits ; but the deeds of these untutored men, who are reclaiming our western land from a barbarian race, would never be known but for a few faithful chroniclers.

Nor were their opponents unworthy of their steel. The *wild* Indian is not afraid to fight, and these men flung themselves upon the waiting steel of the hunters, one by one, until a gory heap cumbered the passage before them, over which their comrades still pressed fiercely, striking desperate blows.

One by one they fell, and yet the rest pressed on, and the arms of the eight hunters became weary with slaughter. Every revolver had been emptied, and in that confined space, it was almost impossible for a bullet to fail to reach a mark.

At last, both parties paused for breath, as if by mutual consent, and glared at each other across the bloody heap of slain.

"Yield yourselves, dogs of white men," screamed Steel-Coat, who had fought foremost among his men, but who had not received a mortal wound. "Give up the child of Steel-Coat, and give yourselves to the torture."

"Kain't be did, old hoss," replied Big Sam. "Keep on fighting ; see who gits tired fust."

Even as he spoke, they heard a low, rumbling sound, and the mountain rocked to its center.

"Whew !" cried Sam, with a whistle. "I'll be durned ef we don't hev a airthquake ef this yer keeps on. Hurry up, old hoss, or we kain't finish it afore the mountain comes down."

The hunters began to reload their revolvers, which was quickly done with the patent cartridge in use. Seeing this, Steel-Coat gave the word, and rushed on, and was the first to strike a blow. The hunters were not slow to meet him, and he was opposed to Big Sam, who seemed to have an especial spite against him. Old Avoirdupois he avoided, and no effort on the part of the latter could reach him. The whites, each pressing one knee upon the bodies of the fallen Indians, emptied every barrel they had managed to reload, against their enemies, and though the bullets seemed to strike Steel-Coat, and even to stagger him, he did not fall. The armor he wore was impervious to any thing except a rifle-ball, and that at close range.

"Cuss yer hard hide," cried Big Sam, as his knife glinted

again and again from the hard surface of the mail. "I'll try another game."

Throwing himself forward suddenly, as Steel-Coat was forcing his way over his fallen comrades, the giant hunter grasped his enemy by the wrists, and exerting all the tremendous power of muscle which dwelt in his frame, he endeavored to drag him across the heap of slain into their midst. While they struggled, a hollow, rumbling sound ran through the mountain a second time, and they saw the whole roof in front seemingly give way and begin to drop like gigantic hail to the floor. The Indians looked up, shrieking in terror, and turned to fly, and Big Sam released his grasp with a cry of horror. The mountain rocked, a peal like thunder was heard, and the whole Indian band was swallowed up in a moment, and three of the whites were struck down by the falling fragments. Steel-Coat, when released by Big Sam, had made a movement as if he would follow his companions, and as he saw that tremendous ruin falling, he started back across the fallen bodies.

But, too late. A massive fragment struck him, and he fell, crushed down among the bleeding bodies beneath the ponderous stone. For a moment, all was confusion and dismay.

Duke Darrall sprung to the side of Wina, with a vague idea of shielding her from danger, little thinking how weak his aid could be against the mighty power which rent the mountain. Yet he threw a protecting arm about her. The men cowered in their places; Big Sam shielded Captain Jim with his broad shoulders from this deadly shower. It was a terrible moment, and one which they could never forget. The mountain yawned, the water disappeared from beneath their feet, and it seemed that the end of the world had come. Before they had time fairly to realize what had occurred, the ruin had been wrought, and their enemies lay buried beneath the wreck of the mountain, and they stood unharmed, with the exception of those who had been struck down in the beginning.

Old Avoirdupois was the first to speak. He had stood with folded arms, calmly regarding the ruin. He saw in this the hand of an incensed Deity, giving warning of his power

to the sons of men. He saw the men who had slain his wife, who had made him desolate, lying beneath the rocks, crushed, silent, pulseless; and he, the greatest villain of all, was lying like a writhing worm beneath the fragment which had struck him down, crying out for the merciful blow which should put him out of his misery.

Their first thought was to raise their fallen comrades. One of them would never move or speak again. The other was merely stunned, and quickly recovered. Old Avoirdupois turned to Steel-Coat, and by the aid of two strong men, lifted the stone and brought him out into the open space, where they laid him down, moaning feebly, and a bloody foam bubbling from his lips. James Seaton removed the visor from his face, and taking a fragment of cloth in his hand, wet it in spirits and removed the paint. All saw in an instant that it was the face of a white man, and as the work of removing the paint was complete, they recognized Rodger Bacon!

"Your revenge is now complete," hissed the dying man. "I hated you, Seaton, hate you yet; and though I must die, it is a joy to me to know that you are hemmed in here to starve. It was who attacked your camp, one of my followers struck down your wife, who despised my love for yours. You have your revenge, and I have mine; my death will only be less painful than yours, and I die content."

"Father!" cried Wina, coming forward, "do not die with such words upon your lips. Ask forgiveness of the Great Spirit ere you die."

"Away!" he cried. "Traitor, you have trailed me to my death on account of your love for the whites. You are no child of mine, but—"

"Then she is mine!" screamed Old Avoirdupois; "my daughter, who was lost upon that dreadful night when her mother was murdered. It must be—my heart tells me it is so!"

"It is false!" hissed Rodger Bacon. "She is no child of yours."

"Lie not as you die, Rodger," replied the old hunter. "The child is mine, and I will claim her, for she has the face of my angel wife."

With a cry of delight, Wina crept into his arms, and nestled close to his bold heart, and a look of baffled malice passed over the face of the dying wretch.

"Then claim her, for she is your child. But you will only regain her to see her die by inches before your eyes. Ha, ha, ha! My revenge is not yet lost."

"God is still with us, base wretch," replied James Seaton, in a voice of dread solemnity. "Look up, and see the work of his hand."

All gazed in the direction of his pointing finger, and saw that the same power which had brought the ruin down upon their enemies had rent the upper crust of the mountain, and that through a wide fissure above the clear sunlight was streaming in.

"Foiled!" screamed Bacon, half-starting to his feet. The effort brought the blood in a great gush from his wounded and crushed lungs, and he fell dead at their feet. The mighty hand which had fought for the Apache, and the brain which had guided them so long, was stilled forever. James Seaton stood above him with a strange look upon his handsome face.

"He was my enemy; he killed my wife, and he is dead, not by my hand. That man was once the dearest friend I had, and I loved him. He robbed me in every way, and I forgave him until he attempted to rob me of my wife; then I cast him off and he swore to be revenged. How well he kept his word you all know. I have done my work. I have avenged my murdered darling, I have regained one whom I never hoped to see again, and now the prairies shall know Old Avoirdupois no more. Welcome, civilization, for the sake of this dear child."

With much labor and difficulty they worked their way out of the deeps of the cavern, and found themselves upon the mountain side, not far from where the Indians had left their horses. It was well for them that this was so, for it was impossible for them to save their own animals, and by the orders of Old Avoirdupois they were all killed, that they might not perish miserably. Of the entire Indian band, not one was left to tell the tale of that terrible hour in the heart

of the mountain, and even the few who were left to guard the horses were slain in their flight, lest they should carry the news to the Apaches and arouse their vengeance against the destroyers of the bravest of their race. The hunters took all the horses and drove them with them wherever they went, passed safely across the plains and reached the post from which they had set out.

Here they parted. Captain Jim had given into the hands of Seaton the papers and letters which he had stolen from the lodge of Steel-Coat, otherwise Rodger Bacon, and they proved beyond a doubt that his enemy had told the truth when the hand of death was on him, and that Wina was his own child. For her sake he determined to leave the life of the plains and teach her the customs of the people with whom she must now pass her life.

The parting between Wina and Duke Darrall was the hardest to bear, but Old Avoirdupois gave him hope.

"Wait two years," he said. "You are both young, and it is proper that my daughter should receive an education before she is fit to become a wife. When that time is ended, come to St. Louis, seek me out, and then if you are both of the same mind I shall not say no."

Then "Old Avoirdupois" parted from his old companions in arms and peril, and with Wina by his side started for the East. She was to receive a decent education. For years Duke led a restless life; then one day he, Big Sam and Captain Jim started off for Saint Louis to bring Wina back home.

When they brought up with "Old Avoirdupois", he was growing old and childish and inquired if Duke had any change of mind on account of the waiting. "Change? Never!" cried Duke.

There was a glad shout as at this time a door opened and from it darted Wina into the arms of her lover, Duke. Big Sam uttered a cry that would have done credit to a Comanche brave and Captain Jim indulged in a few steps of an old-time hornpipe.

It was Wina, indeed, changed as only education and the society of refined people could change her; but still the same frank and loving nature nevertheless.

She did not need to tell Duke that she was his, and that her love was founded on a rock.

"Hold yerself in," said Big Sam to Captain Jim. Hyar, little gal, ain't you goin to speak to me?"

Wina released herself from the arms of her lover and ran to the old hunter, greeting him warmly and Jim was not forgotten nuther. The two stayed a month in St. Louis and were present at the marriage, which came off at the end of that time. When all was over and the wedded pair away the bordermen bade James Seaton farewell. He would have kept them with him always but they were not the ones to live dependent on the bounty of any man, no matter how great a friend, and too much wedded to their free life to leave it now.

In leaving Jim they promised to meet up with him whenever they again visited Saint Louis, and now the curtain is down and all our good friends happy.

